Donald Ross of Heimra

William Black

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DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA.

CHAPTER I.

SMOKE AND FLAME.

But that was not at all the view that Fred Stanley took of this amazing and incomprehensible incident.

"There's some trick in it, Frank," he said vehemently, as he hurried his friend along with him, on their way back to the house. "There's some underhand trick in it, and I want to know what it means. I tell you, we must get the keepers, and go up the hill at once, and see what is going on. There's something at the bottom of all this jugglery."

"Jugglery or no jugglery," his companion said, with much good-humour, "it has come in very handy. If a riot had been started, who knows what the end might have been? It wasn't the raid into the Glen Orme forest that concerned me, nor yet the driving of the sheep off Meall-na-Fearn; but I confess I was anxious about your sister. If she had been denounced before an angry and excited meeting——"

"Oh, we should have been able to take care of ourselves!" the younger man said, dismissing that matter contemptuously.

"And if it was Ross of Heimra who stepped in to prevent all this," Meredyth continued, "I, for one, am very much obliged to him."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Frank!" the other said, with angry impatience. "If it is Donald Ross who has done all this, I'll swear he has done it for his own purposes. And I want to know. I want to find out. I want to see what the trick means. And of one thing I am absolutely certain, and that is, that Donald Ross is up on the moor at this very moment. Oh, yes," the young man went on, seeing that

his wild suspicions received no encouragement from his more cautious companion, "a fine stratagem, to keep us idling and kicking our heels about here all the morning—and on the Twelfth, too! I thought it was odd that the meeting should be fixed for the Twelfth; but now I begin to see. Now I begin to understand why Donald Ross came over from Heimra yesterday afternoon."

"Well, what do you imagine?" Meredyth asked.

"Why, it's as clear as daylight!" the younger man exclaimed—jumping from vague surmises to definite conclusions. "Here have we been hanging about all the morning, like a couple of simpletons, waiting for a general riot or some nonsense of that kind, while Ross and his gang of poachers have been up on the moor, sweeping the best beats clean of every bird! That has been the little programme!—and a fine consignment of game to be sent away to Inverness to-night, as soon as the dark comes down. But they may not be off the hill yet; and we'll hurry up Hector and Hugh, and

have a look round." And then he added, vindictively: "I'd let the Twelfth go—I shouldn't mind a bit having had the Twelfth spoilt—if only I could catch those scoundrels—and the chief of them—red-handed."

"All I have to say is," observed the more phlegmatic Meredyth, "that if we are going up the hill we may as well take our guns with us and a brace of dogs. We can have an hour or two. The fag-end of the Twelfth is better than no Twelfth; and your sister says she wants some birds."

"Birds?" the other repeated. "What do you expect to find on the ground after those poaching thieves have been over it?"

However, in the end he consented; and as they found that Hector—undisturbed by all those alarming rumours of riot and pillage—had kept everything in readiness for them, the two young men snatched a hasty sandwich and set forth. It was not a very eager shooting party. There was a sensation that the great possibilities of the Twelfth had been ruined for them. Nevertheless, there would be some

occupation for the afternoon, and the mistress of the household wanted some grouse.

But, indeed, it soon became evident that it was not shooting that was uppermost in Fred Stanley's mind. He overruled Hector's plan for taking the nearest beats. He would have his companions hold away up the Corrie Bhreag, which leads to the Glen Orme forest; and ever he was making for the higher ranges —scanning the ground far ahead of him, and listening intently in the strange silence; while he was clearly unwilling to have the dogs uncoupled.

"Look here, man," at length said Meredyth, who, though new to the place, had a trained eye for the features of a moor; "surely we have come down wind far enough? It will take us all our time to get back before dinner, even if we pick the beats on the way home——"

The answer was unexpected—a half-smothered exclamation of mingled anger and triumph.

"Didn't I tell you so?" young Stanley exclaimed, with his eyes fixed on a small, dark

object a long distance up the glen. "Didn't I tell you we should find him here? Don't you see him — away up yonder? My lad, when you come poaching, you shouldn't put on sailor's clothes; they're too conspicuous. What do you say, Hector: can you make him out? Well, whether you can or not, I will tell you his name. That is Mr. Donald Ross, if you want to know—and I guessed we should find him here or hereabouts!"

"I am not sure," said Hector, slowly, also with his eyes fixed on the distant and dark figure.

"But I am!" Fred Stanley went on. "And perhaps you can tell me what he is doing up on our shooting?"

"Mebbe," said the serious-visaged keeper, with a little hesitation, "mebbe he was waiting to see that none of the lads would be for going into the forest. Or mebbe he was up at Glen Orme."

"Oh, stuff and nonsense!" the young man cried, scornfully. "Do you think we are children! I tell you, we have caught him at

last; and wherever the rest of the gang have sneaked off to, he is bound to come along here and face it out. Yes, he *is* coming: I can see he is moving this way. Very well, Frank, you have the dogs uncoupled now, and begin to shoot back home: I'm going to meet my gentleman—and I will take my gun with me, just to keep a wholesome check on insolence."

"You will not," said Meredyth, with decision—for he knew not whither this young man's obvious wrath and enmity might not lead him. "I will wait here with you: whoever that is, he is clearly coming this way."

"Why, of course he must!" was the rejoinder. "He sees he is caught: what else is there left for him but to come along and try to put some kind of face on it?" Then presently he exclaimed: "Well, of all the effrontry that I ever beheld! He is carrying a gun under his arm!—how's that for coolness?"

"I am not thinking it is a gun, sir," said the tall, brown-bearded keeper; "it is more like a steeck."

"Yes, it is a stick, Fred," Meredyth put in, after a moment.

"Oh, why should he have a gun? What does he want with a gun?" the young man said, without being disconcerted for a moment. "He has only to direct the operations of his confederates. A stick? — very likely! — the master-poacher doesn't want to be encumbered with a gun!"

And so they waited. It was a singular scene for the Twelfth of August on the side of a Highland hill: no ranging of dogs, no cracking of breechloaders, no picking up of a bird here and there from the thick heather, but a small group, standing silent and constrained, and dimly aware that pent-up human passions were about to burst forth amid these vast and impressive solitudes. Young Ross of Heimra—for it was unmistakably he—came leisurely along; his attention was evidently fixed on the sportsmen; perhaps he was wondering that they did not let loose the dogs and get to work. But as he drew nearer he must have perceived that they were awaiting

his approach; and so—with something of interrogation and surprise in his look—he came up to them.

"I hope you have had good sport," said Fred Stanley.

Donald Ross stared: there was something in the young man's tone that seemed to strike him.

"I—I don't quite understand," said he.

"Oh, well, it's only this," replied the other, striving to keep down his rising rage, and speaking in a deliberately taunting fashion, "that when you find anyone on a Highland moor on the Twelfth of August you naturally suppose that he has come for grouse. And why not? I am sorry we have interrupted you. When you have the fishing and the stalking, why shouldn't you have the shooting as well? I am sorry if we have disturbed you——"

They formed a curious contrast, those two: the tall, handsome, light-haired youth, with his fair complexion and his boyish moustache causing him to look almost effeminate, and yet

with his nostrils dilated, his haughty grey eyes glistening with anger, a tremor of passion about the lines of his lips; the other, though hardly so tall, of more manly presence, his pale, proud, clear-cut features entirely reticent, his coal-black eyes, so far, without flame in them, an absolute self-possession and dignity governing his manner.

"I hardly know what you mean," said he, slowly, fixing those calmly observant black eyes on the young lad. "What is it all about? Do I understand you to accuse me of shooting over your moor—here—now?—do you imagine——"

"Oh, it isn't that only!—it is half-a-dozen things besides!" the young man exclaimed, letting his passion get entirely the mastery of him. "Who has this place? Not those who bought it! It is you who have the shooting and fishing and everything; and not content with that but you play dog-in-the-manger as well—heaving stones into the pools when anyone else goes down to the river. And who does the scringeing about here?—answer me

that!—do you think we don't know well enough? Let us have an end of hypocrisy——"

"Let us have an end of madness!" said Donald Ross, sternly; and for a second there was a gleam of fire in his black eyes. But that sudden flame, and a certain set expression of the mouth, almost instantly vanished; this young fellow, with the girlish complexion, was even now so curiously like his sister. "I do not answer you," Donald Ross went on, with a demeanour at once simple and austere. "You have chosen to insult me. I do not answer you. You are in my country: it is the same as if you were under my roof."

"Your country!" the hot-headed young man cried, in open scorn, "What part of the country belongs to you! That rock of an island out there!—and I wish you would keep to it; and you'd better keep to it; for we don't mean to have this kind of thing going on any longer. We mean to have an end of all this scringeing and poaching! We have been precious near getting hold of those scringe-nets: we'll make sure of them the next time.

And I want once for all to tell you that we mean to have the fishing for ourselves, and the shooting, too; and we want you to understand that there is such a thing as the law of trespass. What right have you to be here, at this moment, on this moor?" he demanded. "How can you explain your being here? What are you doing here—on the Twelfth? Do you know to whom this moor belongs? And by what right do you trespass on it?"

"Fred," interposed Frank Meredyth, who was painfully conscious that the two keepers—though they had discreetly turned away—must be hearing something of this one-sided altercation, "enough of this: if there is any dispute, it can be settled another time—not before third persons."

"One moment," said Donald Ross, turning with a grave courtesy to this intervener. "You have heard the questions I have just been asked. Well, I do not choose to account for my actions to any one. But this I wish to explain. I have no right to be where I am, I admit; I have trespassed some dozen yards on to this

moor, in order to come up and speak to you. When you saw me first I was on the old foot-path—there it is, you can see for yourself—that leads up this corrie, and through the Glen Orme forest to Ledmore; it is an old hill road that everyone has the right of using."

"Oh, yes, thieves' lawyers are always clever enough!" Fred Stanley said, disdainfully.

Donald Ross regarded him for a moment—with a strange kind of look, and that not of anger: then he quietly said, "Good afternoon!" to Meredyth, and went on his way. Hector got out of the prevailing embarrassment by uncoupling the dogs; and Frank Meredyth put cartridges in his gun. This encounter did not augur well for steady shooting.

Meanwhile Donald Ross was making down for the coast, slowly and thoughtfully. What had happened had been a matter of a few swift seconds; it had now to be set in order and considered; the scene had to be conjured up again—with all its minute but vivid incidents. And no longer was there any need for him to affect a calm and proud indifference; phrases

that he had seemed to pass unheeded began to burn; the rapid glances and tones of those brief moments, now that they were recalled, struck deep. Indeed, the first effect of a blow is but to stun and bewilder—the pain comes afterwards; and there are words that cause more deadly wounds than any blows. Taunt and insult: these are hard things for a Highlander to brook—and yet—and yet—that handsome, headstrong boy, even in the white-heat of his passion, had looked so curiously like his sister.

"Ah, well," said Ross, aloud, and there was a kind of smile on his face, "it is, perhaps, a wholesome lesson. Hereafter I'd better mind my own business. And if I have been ordered off the mainland—sent back to my little island—very well: the sea-gulls and gannets won't accuse me of trespass."

In time he drew near the village. But as he went down the hill from Minard, and had to pass Lochgarra House, he did not turn his eyes in that direction. He held straight on; and at length encountered a small boy who had

just been engaged in hauling a dinghy up on the beach.

"Alan," said he, "have you seen Big Archie anywhere about?"

"Ay," said the boy, "he was at the inn to look at the people driving aweh."

"What people? The strangers who were at the church this morning?"

"Ay, chist that. There was many a one laughing at them," said Alan, with a bit of a grin.

"Well, run along now, and see if you can find Big Archie, and tell him I am going out to Heimra. Then you can come back with him, and pull us out to the lugger."

And away went Alan, with a will, eager to earn the sixpence that he foresaw awaiting his return, while the young laird of Heimra, having nothing else to do until Big Archie should put in an appearance, seated himself on the gunwale of the dinghy, with his eyes turned towards the sea. Not once had he glanced in the direction of Lochgarra House.

But Lochgarra House had taken notice of

him. Mary Stanley chanced to be passing one of the windows, when of a sudden her face grew animated, and her eyes—those liquid grey-green eyes that were at all times so clear and radiant—those bland, good-humoured, kind eyes—shone with a quick interest and delight.

"Käthchen! Käthchen!" she called. "There is Mr. Ross just gone by—tell Barbara to run after him—quick! quick!—and—and my compliments—and I want to see him most particularly. He must not go out to Heimra before I have seen him—tell her not to lose a minute—I'm afraid he may be going along now to get Big Archie's boat."

But at such a crisis Kate Glendinning did not choose to wait for any servant. She flew into the hall, snatched a straw hat from the table, tripped down the wide stone steps, and made her way as quickly as might be round the sea-wall and along the beach. He did not hear her approach; he seem plunged in a profound reverie.

"Mr. Ross!" she said, rather breathlessly and timidly, to attract his attention.

He started to his feet; and, when he saw who this was, his naturally pale, dark face grew suddenly suffused—an almost school-boyish constraint visible there for a moment! Käthchen was surprised; but she made haste to deliver Miss Stanley's message.

"She happened to see you from the window; and she is most anxious you should not go back to Heimra before she has a chance of thanking you for your great kindness. For she quite understands it was you who prevented all the mischief that might have arisen from those people coming here; and she is very grateful; and wishes to say so to yourself. And I was to give you her compliments, and say that she wished particularly to see you—if you wouldn't mind coming along for a few moments."

This time he did throw a brief glance in the direction of Lochgarra House—perhaps thinking of what otherwise might have been. But now, how could he ever again be under that roof?

"Will you tell Miss Stanley," said he—and

though that temporary confusion had gone, there was still a curious reserve in his manner —"that I am very glad if I have been of any service to her—very glad that she should think so, I mean; but it isn't worth speaking about; and she must not say anything more about it."

"But she wishes to see you!" exclaimed Käthchen, who naturally had expected an instant acquiescence. "Surely she is the best judge as to whether she ought to thank you, or not. And that was the message I was to take to you, that she wished most particularly to see you, before you went out to Heimra. A few moments only—she will not detain you——"

"If you will excuse me, I would rather not go along," said he, looking uneasily towards the cottages and the inn. "I have just sent for Big Archie."

Käthchen was astounded. What kind of a young man was this, to refuse the invitation of a beautiful young woman—one, indeed, who had shown herself singularly interested in him, even as he had gone out of his way to render friendly little services to her? Käthchen's

secret conjectures, founded on what she had recently observed as between these two, seemed to have been suddenly and rudely stultified. What was the key to this enigma? Jealousy? Was it the presence of Frank Meredyth that interposed? Would he decline to visit the house until that possible rival had been removed? She could not understand; she was bewildered; but still she had her commission to execute; and the faithful Kate was staunch.

"Miss Stanley will be disappointed," said she. "She is most anxious to see you. A couple of minutes would be enough. And surely you could let Big Archie wait."

"Thank you," said he—and it was clear that it was with the greatest reluctance he was forcing himself to refuse—"but I would rather not. I am very sensible of Miss Stanley's kindness; but—but she must not make too much of this trifling thing."

Käthchen paused irresolute. But, after all, she had no more to say. She could not appeal to him, she could not beg of him, as a favour, to accept Miss Stanley's invitation: Käthchen

also had a little pride; so she civilly bade him good afternoon, and hoped he would have a pleasant voyage home; and set out on her way back to the house.

"Well?" said Mary, when Käthchen came into the room. But she had already seen, from the window, that her messenger was returning alone.

"Oh," said Käthchen, in an indifferent sort of fashion—and she began to gather up some samples of homespun that were strewn on the table—"he says he is going out to Heimra at once. He has sent for Big Archie. He says—he says—that he is glad if he has rendered you any little service—but you are not to think of it."

Mary's eyes had grown full of wonder. For out of these windows she could plainly see that he was still waiting on the beach: the fact being that the boy Alan had failed to find Big Archie at the inn, and had gone off to seek him throughout the cottages.

"But did you tell Mr. Ross that I wished to speak with him?" she asked.

"I said that you most particularly wished to speak with him."

"Yes—and then?"

"Then he—he begged to be excused," said Käthchen, bluntly.

Mary turned sharply away from the window, and for a second or two she was silent.

"Why did you say 'most particularly'? What right had you to give him any such message?" she demanded, with something of a cold and dignified air, but not looking towards Käthchen.

"Those were your very words, Mamie!" Käthchen protested.

"I may have said something like that—in the hurry of calling to you," Mary said, with flushed face. "But you ought to have known. You might have known it was not a message I wanted given to anyone—not to anyone. However, it is of little consequence." She advanced to the table—her head somewhat erect. "I suppose," she said, in a matter-of-fact way, "you will be writing about those samples to the Frasers, in Inverness?"

"Yes, Mamie—you told me to."

"Very well," she continued, still with that air of unconcern; "you might say to them at the same time that we can get patchwork quilts made for them at from ten to twelve shillings the piece, if they send us the materials. That is the price I promised to the women here. And if they prefer the stockings made longer, I will have them made longer; only they must give me a little more for them—there is so much more wool and so much more work."

She glanced furtively over her shoulder: it was only now that Big Archie had made his appearance—coming down the beach to the spot at which young Ross was idly walking about.

"Käthchen," she said of a sudden, with something of piteous vexation in her tone, "are you certain you said 'most particularly'? —are you quite certain?—I—I did not mean it—I was in a hurry—you did not say 'most particularly,' did you? At the same time," she went on, with an abrupt affectation of carelessness, "it is of very little consequence—no consequence whatever: the only thing is that

the Highlanders appear to have odd manners —and that again, as I say, is a matter of perfect indifference. Don't forget to mention the patchwork quilts and the stockings."

But Kate Glendinning rose and went to the window. By this time Donald Ross, Big Archie, and the young lad were all in the dinghy, on their way out to the lugger.

"There is something strange, Mamie," Käthchen said, thoughtfully. "I cannot imagine what made him refuse to come along to this house—and refuse with such embarrassment. And these are not Highland manners at all. But sometimes a Highlander is too proud to speak."

They were soon to learn what all this meant. When the two young men returned from their afternoon expedition, it appeared that they had got thirteen and a half brace of grouse, and a few odds and ends—a very fair bag, considering the size of the moor and the length of time they had been out. But it was not the success of the shooting that caused Fred Stanley to come into the drawing-room with something of a gay and triumphant air.

"Well, we have caught your poaching friend at last," he said to his sister, "and I think we have sent him home with a flea in his ear. I knew we should corner him sooner or later, in spite of his cunning. And a very pretty trick it was—to plan this insurrectionary meeting for the Twelfth, so that we should be kept away from the hill, keepers and all. But it didn't work, you see; for we lost no time in getting up to the Corrie Bhreag, and there he was, sure enough. And very little he had to say for himself—not a word!—but I had something to say to him; and I don't think we shall be troubled with his presence about Lochgarra for some little time to come."

"Are you speaking of Mr. Ross?" said Mary, with a certain calmness of manner that did not quite conceal her alarm.

"I should think I was!"

"And what did you find him doing?"

"I found him on the moor—where he had no right to be; and if the rest of the gang managed to hide themselves or to get safe away, well, I did not care much about that; he was

there to answer for them; and so we had it out. Yes, I may say we had it out."

Mary turned to Frank Meredyth.

"Mr. Meredyth, what is all this about? What happened? Did you find Mr. Ross shooting on the moor?"

"Well, no," said Meredyth, with something of disquiet, for he was now placed in a most unenviable position. "The fact is, it would be difficult to bring any definite charge against him; for he was coming down from the direction of the Glen Orme forest, and when we first saw him he was following an old hill-path that everybody has the right to use—so he says. No, he wasn't shooting—not then, certainly; nor did we see any one with him: but as regards Fred's suspicions—well, you know, I have said before, that when you imagine there is poaching going on, you see it in every circumstance."

"What was he doing up there at all?" the younger man broke in. "Why, he had no defence to make. He had not a word to say for himself. It's all very well to be high and

mighty: you won't account for your actions to anybody—no, of course not, when you can't without convicting yourself!"

"I suppose he had a gun with him?" said she, still addressing Frank Meredyth.

"Well, no; he had not," Meredyth confessed, looking somewhat anxious and disconcerted.

"A game-bag, at least? and a dog?" she went on; "or something that entitled you to suspect him?"

"Oh, no, not at all. The truth is, he was simply coming down the strath, and he had nothing under his arm but a walking-stick."

"Oh, indeed," said she; and she drew herself up a little proudly. "Very well. You meet a stranger—no, not a stranger—but one of my friends, whom you have seen under my roof, and he is walking along a public footpath carrying a stick in his hand. Well, and then? I want to know what happens then?"

Meredyth was grievously embarrassed.

"I am afraid there were a few hard words said—and—and I must say for Mr. Ross that

he showed great forbearance and self-control. Yes, I must admit that; and also that Fred was rather too—too outspoken. I must say I rather admired Mr. Ross because of his composure; for, indeed, I thought at one time—well, it was a very awkward meeting. When there is bad blood, you see—when one suspects poaching—everything points that way."

"Oh, I am responsible for everything that occurred!" Fred Stanley broke in again, impetuously. "Meredyth had nothing to do with it—nothing at all! And I tell you I spoke plainly. I thought the time for pretence and hypocrisy had gone by; I thought it was time my gentleman-poacher should understand we weren't going to be made fools of any longer. Oh, I spoke plainly enough, if that is what you want to find out!" continued this confident lad, who seemed to be rather vain of his achievement. "I told him we had had quite enough of him about Lochgarra—quite enough of him, and his scringe-nets, and his thieving of salmon, and heaving of stones into the pools. I told him we wanted this place to ourselves now. I

recommended him to keep to that small island out there——"

"It is infamous—it is shameless!" said Mary Stanley—and the beautiful, proud face had grown suddenly pale, and there was a curious indignant vibration in her voice. "Do you know what that man has done for me, this very day? What does he value most in the world—what remains to him of all the possessions which his family used to hold—what but the devotion and affection with which these people about here regard him? And he risked it all—for my sake! He took my side—against his own people! They were appealed to by everything that could tempt them; and they had been taught to regard me as their enemy; and who knows what might have happened if he had not stepped in, and confronted them, and said—'No.' He has forgiven the injuries, the irreparable injuries, my family have done him and his; he has met me with friendliness at every turn—and always keeping out of the way and claiming no thanks for it; and now the return he gets is—insult!—and insult that

he would scorn to answer." She went on, with increasing indignation: "Shooting and fishing! What do I care for the shooting and fishing! I would rather have every fish in the river and every bird on the hill destroyed than that the disgrace of such ingratitude should have fallen on this house!" She paused—hesitated—her lips began to quiver. "I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Meredyth—I am sorry you should have met with any annoyance to-day." And the next second, and in despite of herself, she had burst into a passionate fit of weeping; while with the proud head bent, her handkerchief covering her eyes, and her frame shaken with sobbing, she left the room. Instantly Käthchen went with her — leaving silence behind.

It was about half an hour thereafter that the dinner-gong sounded upward from the big, empty, echoing hall. Käthchen came down to the drawing-room.

"Miss Stanley would rather that you did not wait for her," said she to the two gentlemen. And therewith Käthchen also withdrew.

CHAPTER II.

A SUMMONS.

"WHAT can I do, Käthchen? What can I do?" she was saying, in accents almost of despair; and in her agitation she was walking up and down before the windows, glancing out from time to time towards the far island that was now shining in the morning sunlight, while the driven blue sea was springing white along its rocky shores. "What can I do? What atonement can I make? Or is it quite hopeless? Is he to be sent away as a stranger, without a word of excuse, or apology, or appeal?" And then she said: "Käthchen, surely there is some fatality in it, that this young man, who has heaped kindness on me since ever I came to this place—but always keeping aloof in a strange, proud way, as if to avoid the possibility of thanks

—surely there is some fatality that he should receive nothing but insult and wrong at our hands. First, my uncle—now, my brother——"

"At all events," said Kate Glendinning, boldly, "I don't see why you should torture your mind about it, Mamie. It has been none of your doing. You are not responsible for what your uncle may have done; and if Fred has spoken in a moment of anger, well, I don't suppose Mr. Ross will prove to be so unforgiving."

"It is the whole family he must think of, Käthchen!" Mary broke in bitterly. "I shouldn't wonder if he hated the very name of Stanley! What a despicable race he must think us! But I suppose there is an end now. He has borne too much already: this puts a climax to it. Unforgiving? Why, even if I could persuade Fred to go out to Heimra and offer him an apology, he would treat it with scorn—and rightly too. I know he would!"

The shrewd Käthchen, though she did not say so, had her doubts on this score. In the dim recesses of her consciousness there was an echo of two lines from 'Maud'—

'Peace, angry spirit, and let him be!
Has not his sister smiled on me?'

And she fancied, for reasons of her own, that if the headstrong lad could be brought to ask for pardon, the somewhat haughty features of the young owner of Heimra would not long remain stern and implacable. But she dared not reveal those reasons, even as she dared not repeat those two lines. She was a prudent lass; and careful not to presume unwarily.

Of a sudden Mary said, in her impetuous way—

"Käthchen, I will take the sheep off Meall-na-Fearn!"

Kate Glendinning looked up, startled.

"Yes," the young proprietress said, with decision. "After breakfast you and I must drive away out and see Mr. Watson. If he will give up Meall-na-Fearn on the same terms as Meall-na-Cruagan, good and well; the sheep must go; and the crofters can have the pasturage divided amongst them. I suppose," she added, with something of embarrassment in the clear-shining eyes, "some one would be

sure to—to carry the news—out to Heimra? Or a line, perhaps—you might have occasion to send out to him——"

"Mamie!" said Käthchen, in warm protest. "What are you thinking of? Is that the atonement you want to make? Do you mean to cut down Mr. Watson's farm still further just to please Donald Ross? Why, it is madness! To begin with, it would not please him—not in the least; he has told you that you have already been far too generous; and I don't know what he would think of such a needless and useless sacrifice."

"Oh, you think he would not approve?" said Mary, slowly. She was now standing at one of the windows, looking out towards the distant island beyond the wide blue plain of the sea.

"I am pretty sure he would not," Käthchen responded, "especially if he fancied it was done to propitiate him: it would put him in a very awkward position. But I'll tell you what I should do if I were in your place, Mamie——"

"Yes," she said, instantly turning from the window. "What is it? Is there anything

I can do, Käthchen? It seems so terrible—and so shameful; and here am I helpless. And then he is so proud—yes, proud and disdainful; I have said it before; only this time he has an ample right to be."

"Well, Mamie, if I were you, I would simply take no notice of what happened yesterday afternoon;" this was Käthchen's advice. "I would assume that the friendly relations between him and you were precisely as they always had been."

"Yes, but how to let him know that that is what I am thinking?" said Mary eagerly—and rather piteously withal.

"I would send him a note," said the intrepid Käthchen.

"About what?"

"About anything!"

"Shall I ask him to come over and dine with us?" Mary asked, rather nervously.

"Well, no: that would be useless; he would not accept—at present," Käthchen made answer. "But indeed, Mamie, I would not send him any invitation, nor would I say

anything that needed an answer: I should write so that he might answer or not just as he pleased."

"Yes, yes," said Mary, with some animation. "Your advice is excellent, Käthchen. I will write at once. And about what? Oh, about kelp. I have got all the information I wanted about the burning of kelp; and I will tell him that any time he comes over to the mainland I should like to show him the report." And then as abruptly she discarded this idea. "No. Kelp is too commonplace. It would be like asking for his advice about something connected with the estate; and I want him to understand that I can get on by myself. Oh, I'll tell you, Käthchen!—the photographs!—the photographs I promised to send to Mrs. Armour. You know how proud he was of the old woman's coming all the way from Canada to have but a glimpse of Young Donald; and I could see how he was pleased by the little attentions I was able to show her—quite grateful he seemed—though you know he doesn't say much."

She was all excitement now, and as happy and sanguine as hitherto she had been despondent. She went and got writing materials forthwith, and hastily, and yet with some consideration, penned this note:—

"Lochgarra House, Tuesday Morning.

"DEAR MR. ROSS,—I do not know whether I told you that, before Mrs. Armour left to return to Canada, I promised to send her a series of photographs of Lochgarra and the neighbourhood. I am arranging to have a photographer come through from Inverness, and any time that you happen to be over here I should be exceedingly obliged if you would spare me a few minutes to let me know what places would be likely to prove most interesting to her.

"Yours sincerely,

"MARY STANLEY."

"Now, you see," she said, as she rather triumphantly handed the letter to Käthchen, "that demands nothing. He does not need to reply unless he happens to have plenty of

time and nothing else to do. It merely shows that, as far as I am concerned, I don't consider that anything has occurred to disturb our friendly relations. It was so clever of you to think of it, Käthchen! And I must send word to Big Archie that I shall want him and his boat. I'm afraid it's too rough to try the steam-launch. I'm so much obliged to you, Käthchen, for thinking about it!"

Indeed, she was quite joyous and radiant. Her keen remorse, and shame, and piteous despair seemed wholly to have fled; she was possessed with an audacious confidence; a sort of gratitude towards all the world shone in her eyes. And Käthchen, who had studied this young woman closely, and who was capable of drawing conclusions, knew perfectly the origin of this buoyancy of spirit: the letter Mary had just written demanded no answer, it is true, but none the less was she in her heart convinced that an answer—an answer confirming all her best anticipations—would be forthcoming, and that without delay. Big Archie was bidden to haste

and get his lugger ready: he was to set out for Heimra at once.

Kate Glendinning was not the only one in this house who could draw conclusions, or at least form suspicions. When the two gentlemen returned that evening from the hill, they found the letters and newspapers that had arrived by the mid-day post spread out on the hall-table; and they began to glance at addresses and tear open envelopes. Fred Stanley was soon satisfied; he went off to his room to change for dinner; but his elder companion remained—holding a letter in his hand, and apparently much concerned about something. At this moment Käthchen appeared, passing across to the door leading out into the garden; and the instant he caught sight of her his eyes seemed to light up with interest. Here was a friend in need.

"Miss Glendinning," said he, in something of an anxious undertone, "could you give me a couple of minutes? Are you going into the garden? May I come with you? I want to ask you to do me a great service—how great I can hardly tell you."

Käthchen was surprised; for this trim, brisk, bronze-cheeked, shrewd-eyed sportsman generally took things in a very happy-go-lucky, imperturbable fashion. But her instant conjecture was a natural one: "Be sure this is about Mamie!" she said to herself.

Well, he accompanied her down the stone steps and into the garden, where she began to employ herself in cutting flowers for the dining-room table, while she listened attentively enough.

"The fact is," said he, "I have just had a letter from home, with no very good news. My father, who is an old man, has been an invalid for a great many years, varying in health from time to time; but now it seems he has had a very bad attack of asthma along with his other ailments, and the doctors have ordered him off to Bournemouth——"

"I am very sorry," said Käthchen, as in duty bound.

"And—I have received an intimation that I may be telegraphed for—I might have to leave here at a moment's notice almost." He hesitated for a second or so. "Miss

Glendinning," he said, "you see how I am situated: I may be called away at any moment —with something that is of great importance to me left unsettled. I have been living in a fool's paradise; I thought there was plenty of time. And then, again, I did not care to confide in any one. But now I am going to appeal to you. Will you tell me something in strictest confidence—something you are likely to know? It might save your friend—you can guess whom I mean — much embarrassment, even pain; and it would be the greatest favour you could possibly confer on me."

And now Käthchen knew her surmise was correct; and perhaps she may have been inclined to think that there was something incongruous, something even humorous, in this ordinarily cool and firm-nerved person appearing to be afflicted by the hesitation of an anxious lover, only that she was also aware of the gravity of the situation. For tragic things may happen even to the steeled.

"Miss Glendinning," said he, "I want you to tell me if there is anything between Mr. Ross and Miss Stanley?"

Well, this was a frank challenge; and she answered it as frankly.

"I do not think there is," she said; "but I think there might be at any moment. That is only my impression; and I may be quite wrong; and indeed I have no right to say so——"

"But I have appealed to you as a friend, to do me this great favour," said he; and then he paused for a second. "The fact is," he went on, as if with some unwillingness, "I have noticed one or two odd things—Miss Stanley's indignation with her brother if he said anything against Mr. Ross—and the painful scene of yesterday evening—these things might lead one to conjecture——"

"Oh, but I'm sure there is nothing between them—nothing at present, at least," said Käthchen, with some earnestness; for this assurance she could honestly give him; and when did a perplexed and troubled lover ever appeal in vain to a woman's heart? "There is nothing between them at present, I am certain of that; and whether there ever may be, who can tell? Both of them have peculiar natures. Both of

them are proud; and she, besides that, is wilful and impulsive; while he is reserved—and—and you might almost think cold—only that I imagine his studiously keeping away from her, and treating her with a kind of distant civility, has some meaning and intention in it. I don't think he would like to become the slave of any woman; and she—well, she is very independent, too. And then both of them are very peculiarly situated: there is the old-standing feud between the two families; it must have been hard on him and on his mother to have strangers coming into the neighbourhood, tearing down the old landmarks. There are things that the Highland nature can never forget; and Mary knows that well; more than once she has said to me, 'Käthchen, there are wrongs that can never be undone; I can never rebuild Castle Heimra.'"

"Yes, yes, I quite understand," said he, rather absently; "and yet Ross does not seem to bear any resentment—not against her. No, nor against any one belonging to her. I must say for him that his forbearance yesterday

towards Fred Stanley was most remarkable: that was another thing that struck me as peculiar. And yet you say there is nothing between him and Miss Stanley?"

"Nothing, I am certain," Käthchen assured him again.

"I am so awfully obliged to you!" he said, with some little expression of relief; and yet he was thoughtful and silent as they walked back to the house—Käthchen having got all the flowers she wanted.

That night, after dinner, when the two young ladies retired to the drawing-room, Mary seemed somewhat disturbed.

"Don't you think it rather strange, Käthchen," she said, "that Big Archie brought no message back from Heimra? I don't mean an answer. I don't mean an answer to my note. That was not necessary—it was hardly to be expected. But why has he not come to say he delivered my letter?"

She went to one of the windows, and pulled aside part of the blind. The night had turned out rather dark and squally; and there were

spots of rain on the glass that caught the light of the lamps within.

"I should like to see Big Archie," said she, with a vague restlessness. And then of a sudden she made this abrupt proposal: "Käthchen, won't you come down with me into the village? Barbara says the gentlemen have gone into the billiard-room, for there is a threatening of rain; but we could put on waterproofs, and run away down there and back, without anything being known of it."

"Is it worth while, Mamie?" Käthchen remonstrated. "He must have delivered your note!"

"Yes; but it is so strange there should be no message of any kind!" said Mary. And then she instantly added, changing her tone: "Of course, it is not at all strange. Only—only, Big Archie sometimes takes a glass of whisky, you know; and he might have got some answer that he has forgotten—perhaps a note that he has left in his pocket——"

"Oh, if you like, I will go with you," said Käthchen at once, rather welcoming a little

bit of adventure; and forthwith both of them hurried away to get their waterproofs.

The night was dark and blustering; the ordinarily clear twilight of these northern regions was obscured by heavy clouds; and the wind that blew in from the sea brought with it a sense of moisture that promised to become actual rain. The two black figures made their way with little difficulty in the direction of the orange lights of the village, the unseen sea washing up on the beach close by them. Neither spoke; but both walked quickly; perhaps they wanted to be back at Lochgarra House before their absence should be known.

Then, just as they were getting near to the inn, Kate suddenly put her hand on her friend's arm. Ahead of them were two other figures, as black as themselves, but looming larger through the dusk.

"That is Big Archie," said Käthchen, in a whisper, "and isn't the other Hector?—yes, I am sure that is Hector!"

At this moment the two men disappeared.

"I know where they have gone," Mary said promptly. "They have gone into the tap-room behind. Well, we will follow, in case the people in the inn should deny them. Come along, Käthchen, I know the way."

The two young women left the main street, crossed a stable-yard, and, guided by the dull glow of a window, went up to a door, which Mary entered. The next moment they were gazing into a small sanded parlour, where Gilleasbuig Mòr and his friend the keeper were standing: indeed, the two men had not had time to sit down nor yet to order anything to drink. The oil-lamp on the table shed a feeble light, but it was quite sufficient to show that Hector, thus caught, was looking terribly guilty; while the great, heavy-shouldered fisherman, whose deep-set grey eyes under the bushy eyebrows seemed to say that he had already had a glass, instantly came to his companion's help.

"Aw, well now," Archie said, in his plaintive Argyllshire accent, "iss it Miss Stanley herself that would be coming in here—indeed, indeed!

—and Hector, the honest lad, chist feenished up with ahl his work—oh, aye—the guns ahl cleaned, and the dogs fed, and everything ready for the chentlemen to-morrow—and me coming bye from the Camus Bheag, and says I, 'Hector, will you come along with me and hef a dram when your work is feenished?' And Miss Stanley need not be thinking there wass any more in our minds than that; for Hector is a fine lad, and a fine keeper, and what harm will a dram do to anyone when ahl the work is done?"

"Sit down, Archie—sit down, Hector!" said Mary, quite good-naturedly. "I saw you come in this way, Archie, and I merely wished to ask you what happened at Heimra."

"Aw, Heimra," said Archie, collecting his thoughts—and his English. "Iss it at Heimra? Aw, well, now, Martha is a ferry nice woman, and she wass giving me some bread and cheese, ay, and a glass of spirits the like of it is not ahlways—a good woman Martha—— "

"Yes, but my note, Archie," said Mary. "The note you took out: I suppose you gave

it to Mr. Ross? And he did not say anything? Well, there was no need for an answer—none in the least——"

"Aw, the letter?" said Archie. "Well, I wass not seeing Mr. Ross at ahl, for he wass aweh up on the north side of the island, setting snares for the rabbits."

"Oh, you did not see Mr. Ross?" said Mary, quickly. "He could not possibly have sent any answer?" She seemed greatly pleased—as Käthchen observed. "No, of course, he could not send an answer if he was away at the other end of the island." Then she turned to Hector; and the tall, swarthy, brown-bearded keeper perceived that the fair young Englishwoman—the Baintighearna—had no mind to rebuke him or to be in any way angry with him. "Why, Hector," she said, quite pleasantly, "that is a very strange thing, that he should go snaring rabbits: why doesn't he shoot them?"

"Mr. Ross, mem," said Hector, in his grave and respectful fashion, "he does not care much about shooting. And the rabbits, if they are

not kept down, would do a dale of mischief on a smahl island like that."

"He is not fond of shooting, then? No; I think he told me so himself." Then, with one of her sudden impulses, she said—"Come, Hector, let me know what all this is about poaching on this place. Ever since I came here I have heard of all kinds of rumours and charges and suspicions; and I want to know the truth. I shan't blame anybody. I want to know the actual truth. Tell me frankly. It isn't such an important thing, after all. I only want to know what is happening around us."

The tall keeper looked concerned—not to say alarmed: the violent scene of the day before was fresh in his mind. But the big, good-natured giant from Cantire broke in.

"Aw, he is a fine lad, Hector, Miss Stanley may be sure of that; and there's no mich poaching going on about this country-side—at least, not about Lochgarra whatever. It's myself that wass hearing Hector seh that if he wass catching the Gillie Ciotach with a gun, he would brek the gun over his head."

"Gillie Ciotach?" said Mary. "I know him —a wild-looking young fellow, with a mark across his forehead. Well, is he a poacher, Hector?"

"It is in this way, mem," Hector said, slowly and carefully; "there's very little poaching about Lochgarra, as Archie says, and Hugh and myself we know it well; but there's some of the young lads, ay, and some of the older men, too, that if they came across a salmon, or a few sea-trout, or a hare, they would be for taking it out to Heimra, and slipping round by the back-door, and Martha there to take the present. Mr. Ross, he does not pay attention to such things; for he is ahlways having a salmon, or a capercailzie, or a box of grouse sent him by the big families that he knows, when their friends are up for the shooting; and he will believe anything that Martha says; and he pays no more heed to such things."

"Yes, but, Hector, what I want you to tell me is this," she interposed—and she spoke with a certain air of proud confidence—"what I want you to tell me distinctly is this: do you mean

to say that Mr. Ross himself would take a gun or a fishing-rod and go where he had no right to go, either fishing or shooting?"

It was a challenge; and Hector met it unflinchingly. He said, in his serious way—

"Oh, no, mem—no, no: there is not anyone about here that would think such a thing of Mr. Ross."

Mary turned to Käthchen, with a quick, triumphant glance. Then she addressed herself again to Hector.

"Well, sit down, and have a chat with your friend, Hector," said she, very pleasantly. "We shan't interrupt you any longer. And if now and again one of the lads about here should be taking out a little present of fish or game to old Martha, for the housekeeping, well, that is a trifling matter; and I dare say she gives them a glass of whiskey for their trouble. And, Archie, any other time you go out to Heimra with a message from me, mind you come back and tell me whether there is an answer or not, even when I am not expecting an answer, because that makes everything certain and

correct. So good-night to you both—good-night!—good-night!" And therewith the two young ladies, who, even in the dull light of this little sanded parlour, had formed such a curious contrast to those two big, swarthy, heavily-bearded men, withdrew, and shut the door after them, and set out for home through the darkness and the drizzling rain.

Next morning Mary said, with a casual glance out towards Eilean Heimra—

"Käthchen, don't you think, if you lived on that island, you would rather have a good-sized steam-launch than any sailing-boat? It would be so much more handy—ready at a moment's notice almost—and taking up so much less time, if you wanted to send a message to the mainland. I suppose Mr. Ross has to think twice before telling his men to get the yacht ready, or even that big lugsail boat."

But as the day wore on there was no sign of either yacht or lugger coming away from Heimra; the grey and squally sea remained empty; indeed, towards the afternoon, the wind freshened up into something like half a gale,

and it grew to be a matter of certainty that Donald Ross would not seek to communicate with the shore. Mary was not disheartened. On the contrary, her face wore the same happy look—that Frank Meredyth could not quite understand. He had become observant and thoughtful: not about grouse.

The following morning broke with a much more cheerful aspect.

"Käthchen," said Mary, before they went down to breakfast together, "don't you think that any time Mr. Ross comes across to the mainland he might as well walk along here for lunch, instead of going to the inn? Talking to us should interest him as much as talking to that soft-headed John, the policeman, or to the sulky Peter Grant, or even to the sing-song Minister. And it would be very pleasant for us, too, with the gentlemen away on the moor all day."

But again the slow hours of the day passed; and, whatever may have been her secret hopes, her anxious fears, or even, at times, her disposition to be proudly resentful, that width of

rough blue water gave no answer to her surreptitiously questioning gaze. There was a fresh westerly breeze blowing; either the smart little cutter or the more cumbrous lugger could have made an easy and rapid passage. However, neither brown sail nor white sail appeared outside the distant headland; and so the afternoon drew on towards evening; and here were the sportsmen come down from the hill, and the dressing-bell about to sound.

After dinner, when the two young ladies were alone together, Mary said—with a curious affectation of indifference—

"I did not ask for an answer, Käthchen. Oh, certainly not. There was no answer needed—but still—it seems to me he might have acknowledged the receipt of my note. Of course I am rather anxious to know on what terms we are—naturally—and—and naturally I should like to know whether he absolves me——" She was silent for a moment. When she spoke again she was more honest: there was something of a proud, hurt feeling in her tone. "I do think he

might have sent me a message. Don't you, Käthchen? Either yesterday morning or to-day—the whole of to-day has been fine weather. I went out of my way to make the first overtures—after—after what happened. I held out the olive-branch. It seems to me that common courtesy would suggest some little acknowledgment: one is not used to being treated in this way——"

"Perhaps to-morrow——" suggested Käthchen, vaguely.

"Oh, if he is not in a hurry, neither am I," said she, with a sudden air of haughty unconcern; and she would have no more said.

Nay, from this moment she seemed to dismiss Donald Ross from her mind. When, on the following day, Eilean Heimra remained as mute and unresponsive as before, she made no remark to Käthchen; she resolutely dismissed an involuntary habit she had formed of scanning the space of sea intervening between the island and the coast; and if Käthchen mentioned Mr. Ross's name, she would either not reply at all, or reply with a cold indiffer-

ence, as much as to say, "Who is the stranger whom you speak of?" All the day long she busied herself with her multifarious duties, and was particularly cheerful; in the evening she showed herself most complaisant towards the two young men who were her guests. She talked of giving a ball to the keepers, the gillies, and their friends; and wondered whether there was anywhere a barn big enough for the purpose.

So time went by; and these four young people occupying Lochgarra House appeared to be as merry and happy as though they had belonged to a certain little band of Florentines of the fourteenth century. For Mary was not always deep-buried in her industrial schemes. Sometimes she and Kate Glendinning would go away up to join the sportsmen at lunch-time; and thereafter, perched high on these sterile and lonely altitudes, she would set to work to add to a series she was forming of sea-views and coast-views—drawings in most of which the horizon-line was close up to the top of the sheet. It is true that in these spacious sketches

she had sometimes to include the island of Heimra; but no mention was made of Donald Ross; it was as if he had gone away, and for ever, into some unknown clime. Even Fred Stanley was almost ready to believe that the poaching had ceased; and so there was peace in the land.

But there came a thunder-clap into this idyllic quiet. One evening, when the two young men returned from their long day on the hill, there was a telegram among the letters on the hall-table. It was for Frank Meredyth. He tore open the envelope.

"I was afraid of it," he said to his companion. "I must be off, Fred, by the mail-car to-morrow morning. Very sorry, old chap, to have to leave you."

"I hope it is nothing serious," young Stanley put in, with his grey eyes grown grave.

"They don't say anything very definite," was the reply. "Only I am summoned, and I must go."

"Then I will go with you," said the other promptly, "as far as London. This just

decides it. I'll accept Nugent's invitation, after all; and if he has started, I'll pick him up at Marseilles. We've seen pretty well what the moor is like; and perhaps some other time my sister asks us down, we may wait on and have a try for a stag or two. Very sorry, though, you must go."

Dinner that evening, in view of this summons, was rather a sombre affair: it was Käthchen who, when the young men subsequently made their appearance in the drawing-room, suggested they should all go out for a stroll up to the top of the Minard road. She thought this little excursion would remove some of the prevailing constraint. Besides, it promised to be a beautiful moonlight night; and from the summit of the hill they would have a view of the wide southern seas, with the black headlands running out into the shimmering pathway of silver.

Well, the expedition, so far as pictorial effects were concerned, was entirely successful; but it was not moonlight that was in Frank Meredyth's mind. He was going away on the

morrow; he did not know what might happen in his absence; and he thought his departure was a fair and reasonable excuse for his revealing to Mary Stanley certain hopes and aspirations that had gradually, and for some long time back, been taking possession of him. On their way back to the house Fred and Käthchen were walking on in front; the night was still, so that half-murmured words were enough; the surroundings lent a certain charm. And so it came about that Frank Meredyth asked Mary to become his wife.

Now it cannot be said that the language in which this proposition was couched was quite in accordance with these poetical accessories of moonlit vale, and larchwood, and hill; for the average young Englishman, however honest and sincere he may be, does not express himself fluently on such occasions; probably he would be ashamed of himself if he could and did. Nevertheless, a proposal of marriage, however stumblingly and awkwardly conveyed, is a very serious thing to a young woman; and Mary, startled and frightened, had only the

one immediate and overwhelming desire—to postpone the terrible necessity of giving a definite answer. For it was all too bewildering. She wanted to think. To tell the truth, Frank Meredyth's wooing had not been too open and avowed. A man of the world in other things, in this he had been a little shy—one touch of nature among a thousand conventionalities. Then, again, was not a refusal a very cruel thing, that should be administered gently?

"Oh, Mr. Meredyth," she said, in a very low and rather breathless voice, "I think—I think—this is hardly the time——"

"But surely it is!" said he. "For I am going away to-morrow morning. And I don't know when I may see you again. And I should like to take with me some little word of hope—something to remember——"

"Did you see that hare?" Fred Stanley called to them, looking back for a moment.

Meredyth did not pay much heed to the hare.

"Perhaps I have asked you too abruptly," he went on, in the same hurried and confused undertone. "Perhaps I am asking too much—

that you should say something definite all at once. Very well: I will not press for an answer—I will wait—I will wait——"

They were emerging from the shadow of the larch trees; before them was an open space of gravel, white in the moonlight, and beyond that rose the grey walls and turrets of Lochgarra House.

"Only tell me this," said he, in a still lower voice, "tell me if there is any one before me. I have hesitated about speaking earlier because I imagined certain things—perhaps I was mistaken—at least you will tell me that—tell me if there is some one else——"

"No," said Mary, as they crossed that space of white moonlight, and perhaps she spoke a little proudly. "That—at least—I can assure you——"

"No one?" he said, eagerly, in the same undertone.

But here they were at the house—with Fred and Käthchen waiting for them on the grey stone terrace: these two had turned to look at the wonderful beauty of the night.

CHAPTER III.

A FORECAST.

Now, among the numerous undertakings on which the young proprietress of Lochgarra had set her heart was the establishment of a Public Reading-room and Free Library; and to that end she had planned and built—employing local labour only—a large, long, one-storeyed erection, of a solid and substantial cast, fit to withstand the buffetings of the western storms. The interior was as simple and unpretentious as the exterior; there was nothing beyond a strip of platform, a series of plain wooden benches, a few deal tables and chairs, and a small space partitioned off as kitchen. The rules and regulations, of her own sketching out, were likewise of an artless nature. The place was to be open to the whole community. Tea and coffee at

cheap rates were to be procurable between five and seven a.m., and from seven till nine in the evening: the morning hours were for the benefit of bachelor workmen on their way to work, or of fishermen coming in cold and wet after a night at sea. Although reading was the ostensible aim, women were free to bring their knitting or sewing: good lamps would be provided, and a good fire in winter. There were to be no set entertainments of any kind; but on certain evenings such of the young people as could sing or play on any instrument would be expected to do their best for the amusement of their neighbours. Thus far only had she drawn out her simple code; she wished to get the opinions of the villagers themselves as to minor details; and so, all being ready, there one day appeared the following modest little handbill—"On Tuesday next, at six o'clock in the evening, Miss Stanley will open the Public Reading Room for the use of the inhabitants of Lochgarra. Everyone is invited to attend."

It was on the Monday afternoon that she and Kate Glendinning went along to have a final

look. Apparently all was in order; though, to be sure, the supply of books, magazines, and newspapers was as yet somewhat scanty. But it was something else that was uppermost in Mary's mind at this moment.

"You don't think me really nervous, Käthchen?" said she, in a half-laughing and yet concerned way.

"No, I do not," her friend said explicitly. "Why, you, of all people!—you have courage for anything——"

"Look at that platform," Mary went on. "It is only a few inches raised above the floor. Yes, but those few inches make all the difference. Standing here I might perhaps be able to say something; but I declare to you, Käthchen, that the moment I set foot on that platform I shall be frozen into a voiceless statue. Why, I am trembling now, even to think of it! I feel the choking in my throat already. And to have all those eyes fixed on you—and your brain going round—and you unable to say a word; I know I shall tumble down in a faint—and the ignominy of it——"

"It is very unfortunate," Käthchen admitted, as they left the building and set out for home again, "that Mr. Meredyth was called away so suddenly. He could have done it for you. Or even your brother. But if you are so terrified, Mamie, why don't you ask the Minister? —he is accustomed to conduct all sorts of meetings."

"No, I could not do that either," Mary said. "You see, I want the people thoroughly to understand that they are not going to be lectured or preached at. They are not even to be amused against their will. The whole place is to be their own: I have no educational fad to thrust on them. Do you remember Mrs. Armour talking about the *Ceilidh* of the old days?—well, I want to revive the *Ceilidh*; and I am not sure that Mr. Pettigrew would approve. No; I suppose I must get up on that platform, even if my knees should be knocking against each other. And if my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth, well, you must come forward, Käthchen, and make an apology, and tell them that I give them the use of the build-

ing and its contents, and that there's no more to be said."

Now Kate Glendinning, during these last few seconds, seemed to be occupied with something far ahead of them, on which she was fixing an earnest gaze. The afternoon around them was clear and golden, with an abundance of light everywhere; but the sun was getting over to the west, so that the larches threw a shadow across the Minard highway, whither her eyes were directed. Presently, however, she seemed to have satisfied herself.

"Well, Mamie," said she, "I have never tried to address a meeting, so I don't know what it is like; but I should have thought you had nerve and courage for anything."

"It isn't nerve, Käthchen; it isn't courage!" she exclaimed, in a kind of mock despair. "Why, at a Lord Mayor's dinner, I have seen one of the bravest soldiers that England possesses—I have seen him with his hands shaking like a leaf as he stood up to answer to a toast."

"Very well, then, Mamie," said her com-

panion, calmly, "if you are so frightened, why don't you get Mr. Donald Ross to take your place? I am sure he would do it for you at once. And as for asking him, there can be no trouble about that; because if you look along there you will see him at the foot of the Minard road, and he is coming this way."

For one startled second Mary stood stock still, her eyes filled with alarm: perhaps some wild notion that escape might even yet be possible had flashed through her brain. But that was only for a moment. Käthchen had just been complimenting her on her courage: she could not show the white feather the very next minute. So instantly she resumed her onward walk, and that with something of an air of proud confidence. She was 'more than common tall,' and there was a certain freedom and dignity in her gait: how could any by-stander have told that under that brave demeanour her heart was going like the heart of a captured hare?

"Oh, what were you saying, Käthchen?" she resumed, with a fine assumption of care-

lessness. "The Mansion House dinner—oh, yes, I assure you—a very famous soldier—and his hand was shaking—you see, I happened to be sitting next him——"

"Mamie, are you going to ask Mr. Ross about the photographs?" Käthchen asked, in a low voice, for young Donald of Heimra was drawing nearer.

But what could she say in reply? This encounter was altogether too abrupt and unexpected a thing. She had not even time to recall what she had decided was her position with regard to this solitary neighbour of hers. If he had wronged her by neglect, she had vehemently professed to Käthchen that that was of no consequence. If, on the other hand, he was still haughtily indignant over the insults that had been heaped upon him by her brother, how could she make him any fit apology? In fact, she hardly knew whether to treat him as friend or foe; and yet here he was approaching them—every moment coming nearer—and her heart going faster than ever.

As for him, he kept his eyes fixed on her,

with a calm and even respectful attention. He, at least, was not embarrassed; and Mary, in a desperate kind of way, was conscious that it was for her to decide; she was aware, without looking, that he was expectant; she was mortified to think that her face was flushed and confused, while he was tranquilly regarding her. Then of a sudden she rebelled angrily against this calm superiority; and just as he came up she glanced towards him and coldly bowed. He raised his cap. Was he going on—without a word?

"Oh, Mr. Ross," said she, stammering and embarrassed, and yet affecting to treat this meeting as quite an everyday affair, "it is strange we should just have been talking about you—you—you haven't been much over to the mainland of late, have you?—perhaps you haven't seen the reading-room since it was finished—no, I suppose not—do you think it will be of any use?—do you think it will be of any service?—do you think the people will care for it?"

"They ought to be very grateful to you,"

said he. "I wonder what you are going to do for them next?"

The sound of his voice seemed immensely to reassure her.

"Grateful?" she said, quite cheerfully, and despite her conscious colour she managed to meet his eyes. "Well, I, for one, should be exceedingly grateful to you if would do me a very particular favour with regard to this same reading-room. Miss Glendinning was talking about you only a moment or two ago—and—and the fact is, I propose to hand over the building to-morrow afternoon——"

"I saw the little handbill," said he, with a smile.

"Then I hope," said she, with an answering smile, "that you haven't come over to turn away my audience, as you did in the case of the people who wanted to create a disturbance."

"Oh, no," said he, "I hope you did not suspect me of any such intention. Oh, no; it was quite the other way, indeed—if any one had asked me——"

"But I want more than that from you," said

she—and all her confusion seemed to have fled: she was regarding him in the most friendly way, and talking with a happy confidence. "I want far more than that, Mr. Ross, if you will be so kind. Do you know, I was telling Käthchen here that the moment I put my foot on the platform to-morrow evening I should expire, or faint, or do something terrible; for what experience have I in addressing a meeting? I assure you I am in an absolute fright about it; I tremble when I think of it; when I try to imagine what I am going to say, my throat seems to gasp already. Now would you do this speechmaking for me—what little is needed? Would it be too much of a favour? Is it asking too much?"

This was her brief prayer; and Käthchen, standing by, a not uninterested spectator, was saying to herself, 'Well, Mamie, you have the most extraordinary eyes, when they choose to be friendly, and interested, and appealing; I wonder what mortal man could resist them?' It was not Donald Ross, at all events.

"Oh yes, certainly; I will do that for you

with pleasure," said he at once. "I have never in my life addressed a meeting; but I don't suppose there can be any trouble about it—especially when one knows the people. Only, you must tell me what I am to say: if I am to be your counsel, you must give me instructions——"

"Oh, yes, yes," said she, quite eagerly. "I will tell you all the regulations I mean to propose; and the points on which I want to have the public opinion. Are you very busy just now? Will you come along and have tea with us? Then I could tell you all I wish to have said."

He hesitated; and the least tinge of colour appeared in the pale, keen, resolute face. He had not expected to be asked so soon to cross the threshold of Lochgarra House. Nevertheless, after that momentary indecision, he said—

"Thank you, yes, I will go with you and get my brief. Though it does seem a little impertinent in me to presume to be your spokesman."

"Oh, don't say that," she remonstrated,

warmly. "I cannot tell you how much I am obliged to you. Why, Käthchen will assure you that I was just about dying with fear."

And all this had taken place so rapidly that even Käthchen was a little bewildered. How had such a mighty revolution come about within the space of two or three swift seconds? A few minutes before, and Mary Stanley would not have allowed this young man's name to have passed her lips; and now she was regarding him with the most obvious favour, and smiling and talking with an eager delight; while his keen, dark face and expressive eyes answered her in kind. Kate Glendinning, as they walked on towards the house, did not seek to interfere in this conversation: to watch the demeanour of those two was of far greater interest to her than any question connected with the Free Library. And Käthchen, if she did not talk to them, could commune with herself. 'Mamie,' she was saying, in this secret fashion, 'you should not show yourself so anxious to please. It isn't like you. If you are overjoyed to be on friendly terms with him

again, don't make it so manifest. You shouldn't seek him; let him seek you. And don't allow your eyes to say quite so much: do you know that they are just laughing with gladness?' And then, as they were passing into the hall, the door leading out on to the garden-terrace recalled a certain little incident. 'Poor Mr. Meredyth!' said Käthchen to herself.

In the drawing-room, again, Mary plied this guest of hers with every kind of pretty attention; and seemed very pleased and happy; while she grew almost reckless in her philanthropic schemes. Indeed, it was Donald Ross himself who had to interpose to put a check on her generous enthusiasm.

"No, no," he said, with a smile, and yet with a certain quiet and masterful air that was habitual with him, "you must not do anything of the kind. Giving them Meall-na-Cruagan was quite enough. You must not think of giving up Meall-na-Fearn as well. You would be crippling Mr. Watson to no purpose. The crofters have quite enough pasture now for their stock."

"Yes, but I want to do everything," she insisted, "I want to try everything that can be thought of—everything—before coming to the last confession of failure: and you know what that is?"

"What?"

"Why, emigration. Oh, I haven't forgotten your threat," she said, with some little touch of confusion in her smiling eyes, "to take away the people with you to Canada or New South Wales, or some such place. And—and I don't want that. That seems to me ignominious. That seems to me simply a confession of failure."

"At all events," said he, "it was not as a threat that I made the suggestion. I thought it would help you."

"Oh," said she, with her face flushing a little, "but I don't want anybody to go away. Surely something else should be tried first. There are many things to be done. I want to have many more looms going; and the fishing developed; and several new industries started—perhaps even kelp-burning, if there are sufficient beds of seaweed. Why, I consider I am only beginning

now. I have been simply clearing the way—getting fair rents fixed—and all that; and—and I don't want to be interfered with, in that rude fashion. Give me time. Let me have my chance first. Then if I fail——"

"Oh, but we shan't talk of failure," said he, good-naturedly. "Failure would be too cruel a return for all your kindness to these people."

He stayed till very near dinner-time: those two seemed to have so much to say to each other—and not about the Lochgarra estate only. Directly he had gone, Mary said, in quite an eager and excited fashion—

"Käthchen, if I had had the courage of a mouse, I'd have asked him to dine with us! Why shouldn't I? Don't you think I might—the next time? Don't you think I might? It is so pleasant for neighbours to be on neighbourly terms. And just imagine what his life must be out in that little island, seeing no one. It seems to me that, situated as we are, it is almost a duty to ask him to come to the house. And why not to dinner? If he comes in, and has tea with

us, why not dinner? What is the difference between tea and dinner?"

"He has very eloquent eyes," said Käthchen, demurely. "He seemed much pleased with his visit this evening."

"Käthchen," said Mary, and she seemed a little restless, and yet very happy withal: she went to the window occasionally to look at nothing, and appeared quite oblivious of the fact that the dinner-gong had just sounded—"Käthchen, do you remember the blue and gold embroidered scarf that I told you could be so easily turned into a hood for the opera?"

"I'm sure I do!" said Käthchen, little dreaming of what was coming.

"Then I'm going to give you that—yes, I will—now, don't protest——"

"Indeed I must, though, Mamie," said Käthchen, warmly. "Why, what use would it be to me? And you know how admirably it suited your complexion and the colour of your hair. What mania for giving has seized you this afternoon? I thought you were going to throw away the whole of the Lochgarra estate;

and I was glad to see Mr. Ross put some curb on your wildness. And I must say you were very amenable, Mamie. You're not quite so self-willed when Mr. Ross is talking to you——"

"I'm going to be self-willed enough to make you take that scarf, Käthchen," said Mary, with a gay impetuosity. "Yes, I am. I will send for it to-morrow. Why, you know it is a pretty thing, Käthchen—the Albanian needlework is so quaint—and I remember perfectly that you admired it——"

"But what use would a hood for the theatre be in a place like this!" Käthchen exclaimed.

"Don't I tell you it is a pretty thing to look at, here or anywhere else?" was the imperious rejoinder. "And I want to give it to you, Käthchen—and that's all about it—and so not another word!"

When at length they went in to dinner, Mary sate silent and thoughtful for a little while: then she said—

"Käthchen, did you ever hear a voice that gave you such a curious impression of sincerity?"

"Do you mean Mr. Ross's?" said Käthchen, gravely.

"Yes," said Mary, with a bit of a start: she had been forgetting. "I mean quite apart from the quality of the voice, and that of itself seems to me remarkable. For you know most men's voices are repellent—unnecessarily harsh and grating—you are not interested—you would rather keep away. But his voice, quiet as it is, thrills; it is so clear, and soft, and persuasive; I don't know that you can say of a man that he has a musical voice in talking, but if you can, then his is distinctly musical. Only that is not what you chiefly think of. It is the honesty of his tone that is so marked. He never seems to talk for effect; he does not want to impress you, or make any display; it is the truth he aims at, and you feel that it is the truth, and that you can believe down to the very depths every word he is uttering. And you seem to feel that he makes you honest too. It is no use trying any pretence with him. He would laugh at you if you did—and yet not

cruelly. He is so direct, so simple, so manly, not a grain of affectation to be discovered. I wonder, now, when he is called to the Bar, if he will practise in the courts? For don't you think I rather effectually stopped the emigration scheme—didn't I, Käthchen? Oh, yes, I don't think he will talk any more about Canada or Australia—not, at least, until I have had my chance. But on the other hand, if he were to remain in this county, and practise at the Bar, don't you think he would succeed? I know if I were a judge, and Mr. Ross were pleading before me, I should have little difficulty in deciding who was speaking the truth."

"Counsel are not paid to speak the truth: quite the reverse," said Käthchen.

"And when he laughs, there is nothing sarcastic in his laugh—nothing but good-nature," continued the young lady, who was not paying much attention to Barbara's ministrations. "Is there anything so horrid as a cackling laugh—the conceited laugh of a small nature? Yes, it is a very good thing he has so pleasant and good-humoured a laugh

—for—after all—yes, perhaps he is just a little blunt and peremptory. What do you think, Käthchen? Did you think he was a little dictatorial? And you said something—that I was amenable? But was I too amenable, Käthchen? I hope he did not imagine that I was subservient—especially if he was rather masterful and plain-spoken——"

"Come, come, Mamie, don't quarrel with him when he has hardly had time to get out of the house," Käthchen interposed, with a smile. "I consider that the manner of both of you was quite perfect, if what you wanted to convey was that you were both highly pleased to meet in this way and have a confidential and friendly chat. Dictatorial? Not in the least! Of course he knows a good many things about this place; and it was to save you yourself from being excessive in your generosity that he spoke plainly. And speaking plainly—why, wasn't it that very thing you were praising only a moment ago, when you spoke of the simplicity and sincerity of his speech?"

"Because," said Mary, drawing up her head a little, "if—if I thought he considered me too complaisant and submissive—if I thought so—well, I would show him something different."

"Now, are you determined to quarrel?" Käthchen exclaimed, with laughing eyes. "Here is this poor young man who meets you in the road, and he is as respectful and distant as could possibly be, waiting to see how you mean to treat him; and you seem a little doubtful; then of a sudden you resolve to make the first advances; and the next thing is that you appear so glad to find that both of you are on friendly terms, that nothing will do but he must come away home and have tea with you; and you are exceedingly kind to him, and he is exceedingly grateful—as those black eyes of his showed. What is there in all that? Yet now you must alarm yourself by thinking you have been too complaisant!"

"No, Käthchen, no; not that I think so; what I dread is that he may have been thinking so."

"If I were to tell you, Mamie," said Käth-

chen, "what I imagine to have been in Donald Ross's mind when you and he were sitting talking together, eyes fixed on eyes, with never a thought for anything or anybody else in the whole wide world, well, I suppose you would be indignant, and would probably tell me to attend to my own affairs. Which I mean to do—only I am not blind." For a second Mary regarded her friend with a scrutinizing glance; but she had not the courage to speak; she changed the subject—and hardly mentioned Donald Ross's name for the rest of that evening.

Next day, and especially towards the afternoon, there was quite a commotion in the village, for small things become great in a remote little community like Lochgarra; and when it drew near to six o'clock there were various groups of people scattered around the new building, walking about and chatting, sometimes peeping in at the door with a vague curiosity.

"I wonder if he expects us to go along and meet him there?" said Mary, rather anxiously to Käthchen.

"You mean Mr. Ross?" said Käthchen, though well she knew to whom the "he" referred. "I should think he would call for us. The *Sirène* is not in the bay; she must be round in the Camus Bheag; so Mr. Ross will be coming down from Minard."

Käthchen's anticipations proved correct; young Ross, in passing Lochgarra House, stopped for a moment to ask if the ladies had gone on; and, finding that they were just about ready to set out, he waited for them. And thus it was that the inhabitants of Lochgarra again witnessed a strange sight—something far more wonderful than the opening of a Free Library: they beheld young Donald of Heimra acting as escort to this Englishwoman—this alien—this representative of the family that had drained the waters out of Heimra Loch, and torn down the walls of the old Castle. And not only that, but when they came along, he seemed to manage everything for her. He drove the people into the large, long room, and got the benches filled up; he had two chairs placed on the platform, one for Miss

Stanley and one for Miss Glendinning; and then, standing by the side of the Baintighearna, proceeded to speak for her, and to explain the conditions attaching to this bequest.

And here once more Mary, sitting there silent and observant, may have been struck by the curious directness and simplicity of his speech. Concise, explicit sentences: they seemed to accord well with his own bearing, which was distinctly straightforward, intrepid, resolute. Indeed, so little of effort, so little of talking for effect was there about this address, that once or twice, and in the most natural way in the world, he turned to Miss Stanley and asked her for information on certain points. Finally, he told them that Miss Stanley wished for no ceremony, opening or otherwise; they were merely to take possession; and they would now be left to examine the resources of the building including the duplicate catalogues of the library.

"Three cheers for Donald Ross of Heimra!" called out a voice—and a cap was twirled to the roof.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Gillie

Ciotach!" said Ross, with a quick frown; and then he went on calmly: "It is Miss Stanley's express wish that there should be no formalities whatever, otherwise I should have proposed a vote of thanks to her for her very great kindness and thoughtfulness. However, that is not to be; and the best way you can show what you think of her munificent gift is by making a good use of it and taking every care of it." He turned to the Baintighearna. "I suppose that is about all I have to say, Miss Stanley?"

"Yes, I think so: thank you so much!" she said, in rather a low voice—for she was a trifle self-conscious before all those people.

Then she rose. He stepped down from the platform, and led the way along the hall. There was some covert clapping of hands and stamping of feet; but the Gillie Ciotach had been snubbed into silence; and, indeed, the majority of those sad and weather-worn countenances remained stolidly indifferent, as if they hardly knew what was happening around them. Ross opened the door for his two companions, and

followed them out into the golden-clear afternoon; the villagers were left to overhaul at their leisure this new possession, and to become familiar with its opportunities.

But no sooner were those three out in the open, and by themselves, than Mary Stanley's manner underwent a complete change. She had thrown off that platform constraint; she was profuse in her expressions of gratitude; her eyes were shining with pleasure.

"How can I ever sufficiently thank you?" said she. "I could never have got through it by myself—never! And of course they will remember everything you said: any word of yours is all-important with them. I am a stranger. I am suspected. But when you are on my side all goes well. And now that this serious business has been got over, I feel as if we had earned a holiday for the rest of the day," she continued, in a very radiant and light-hearted fashion. "What shall we do, Kathchen? Can't you devise something? Can't you devise some wild escapade—something terrible—something unheard of?"

"The Lady Superior of Lochgarra," said Donald Ross, "is much too distinguished a person to indulge in wild escapades."

"At least," said she, turning to him—and they were now on their way to Lochgarra House—"it would be very hard if we three, having so successfully got through the solemn duties and labours of the day, were to separate now. Don't you think we are entitled to a little relaxation? Now, tell me, Mr. Ross, where you are going at this moment. Back to the *Sirène*, are you not? And you will be dining alone? And after that a book and a pipe in the solitary saloon—isn't that about how you will pass the evening?"

"You have guessed pretty near the truth, Miss Stanley," said he, with a smile.

"Then," said she, boldly, "why should we separate? Come in and dine with us. Give up your book, and let two frivolous creatures talk to you. We will allow you to go away at ten; and it will be a clear starlight night—you will have no difficulty in finding your way round to the Camus Bheag. Now, will you?"

"Indeed, I shall be most happy," said he, without an instant's hesitation; and again Miss Stanley's clear grey-green eyes thanked him—as they could, when she had a mind.

And really this proved to be a most joyous and careless evening, without an atom of restraint or reserve; the little group of friends, brought together in that far-away corner of the world, developed a very frank and informal intimacy; the time sped swiftly. Mary was in especial merry-hearted and audacious; occasionally betraying new moods of wilful petulance; and then again becoming suddenly honest, as much as to say, "No, don't believe that of me; it was only mischief." Even Käthchen was less demurely observant than usual; she had become a little more accustomed to the flame of those coal-black eyes; moreover, the young man had a winning smile. He was no longer the proud and austere person whom she had regarded with a little anxiety and even awe. Implacable she was no longer ready to call him: surely one who could laugh in that frankly good-humoured way was not likely to

prove revengeful and unforgiving? As for his being haughty and imperious, she noticed one small circumstance—that ever and again, amid this familiar and sprightly intercourse, he checked himself a little, and would address Miss Stanley with something almost of deference. It was as if he were saying, 'It is exceedingly kind of you to treat me in so very friendly a fashion; but still—still—you are the Lady Superior of Lochgarra—and I am your guest.' And sometimes he seemed to veil his eyes a little—those burning eyes that might unawares convey too much.

The lightning moments fled; ten o'clock came ere he knew. Indeed, it was half-an-hour thereafter before he chanced to look at his watch; and instantly he rose, with a quite boyish confusion on his clear, finely-cut face.

"When do you go back to Heimra?" said Mary to him—the two young ladies having accompanied him out into the hall.

"I hardly know," said he. "I am waiting for a rather important letter that I must answer at once."

"Not to-morrow, then?"

"Perhaps not."

"For I have sent for the photographer," said she, "and he may be here the day after."

"But I will stay over," said he; "oh, yes, certainly; I should be so pleased if I can be of the least service to you."

"Oh, thank you." And then she hesitated. "To-morrow—to-morrow you will simply be waiting for the mid-day mail?"

"Yes—is there anything that I can do for you in any way?"

"Oh, no," she made answer, with still further hesitation. "Some day—I am going to ask you to let me have a peep at the *Sirène*. She seems such a pretty little yacht."

"Won't you come along and look over her to-morrow morning, if the weather is fine?" said he, quickly.

"Would you like to go, Käthchen?" asked Mary, with a little shyness.

"Oh, I should be delighted," answered the useful Käthchen, divining what was wanted of her.

"If you are sure it is not troubling you," said Mary to her departing guest.

"Why, it will give me the greatest possible pleasure," said he. "Come as early as ever you like. It will be quite an event: it is many a day since I had the honour of receiving visitors on the little *Sirène*."

"Then about eleven," said Mary; and therewith he took his leave.

When they got back to the drawing-room, Kate Glendinning threw herself into the chair she had recently quitted.

"Well, I think he is simply splendid!" said she, as if she had some difficulty in finding words to express her enthusiasm. "That's all I can say—just splendid. He is so curiously straightforward, outspoken, independent; and yet all the time he is so careful to treat you with marked respect. If his eyes laugh at you, it is in such a good-natured way that you can't take offence. And he never agrees with you for courtesy's sake—never—oh, not a bit; but yet, as I say, to you he is always so respectful—in so many little ways—didn't you notice?

Ah, well, Mamie," continued the observant but nevertheless cautious-tongued Käthchen, "it's a curious world, the way things happen in it. Do you remember, when you first came here, your distress about the destruction of Castle Heimra? You said nothing could ever atone for that; and I was of your opinion then. But I am not so sure now. I should not be so surprised, after all, if there were to be some atonement for the pulling down of Castle Heimra."

Mary did not answer: she had gone to put some Japanese water-colours into a large portfolio. Nor could the expression of her face be seen; if there was any indignant colour there, any proud, maidenly reserve and resentment, it was invisible; for she remained standing by the portfolio for some time, turning over the leaves.

CHAPTER IV.

SLOW BUT SURE.

THE next morning was the very perfection of a September morning, clear, and crisp, and still: there was just enough wind to lift away the lazy blue smoke from the cottage chimneys, and to stir the smooth waters of the bay with a shimmering ripple. And here was the carriage in front of Lochgarra House, waiting for the two young ladies to come down.

"Käthchen," said Mary, in an undertone, as they took their seats and were driven off, "supposing I should get a chance of speaking to Mr. Ross privately—for a minute or two—do you think I should venture to apologise to him for Fred's outrageous conduct? What would you do if you were in my place?"

"Not that—oh, no, Mamie, not that!"

Käthchen said at once. "Don't you see how he wishes to ignore it altogether? And surely you remember what he himself said about the pulling down of Castle Heimra? 'There are some things that are best not spoken of.'"

"It is very generous of him," said Mary, absently.

They drove away up the Minard road; and when they had got some distance past the top of the hill, they dismissed the carriage, and left the highway, striking across the rough high ground by a worn footpath. Presently they found far beneath them the sheltered waters of the Camus Bheag; and the first thing they saw there was the *Sirène* at her moorings, with all her sails set and shining white in the morning sun. The next thing they perceived was that the two sailors, Coinneach and Calum, were on the beach, by the side of the yacht's boat; while standing some way apart was Donald Ross. And who was this who was talking to him?—a young girl, whose light brown curly hair was half hidden by her scarlet shawl.

"It is Anna Chlannach!" said Mary. "Now

I have got her at last! She is always escaping me—and I want to convince her that I will not allow Mr. Purdie to lock her up in any asylum. Käthchen, couldn't we get down some other way, so that she may not see us?"

But at this very moment the girl down there happened to catch sight of them; and instantly she turned and fled, disappearing from sight in an incredibly short space of time. For one thing, the face of this hill was a mass of tumbled rocks, intermingled with long heather and thick-stemmed gorse, while skirting it was a plantation of young larch: most likely Anna Chlannach had made good her escape into this plantation.

"Why did you let her go?" said Mary, reproachfully, when she had got down to the beach. "You knew I wanted to talk to her."

"It isn't easy reasoning with Anna Chlannach," said Donald Ross, with his quiet smile. "She still associates you with Purdie; she is afraid of you. And this time she was on other business; she was pleading with me to take her out to Heimra—offering me all the money

she has got—her shells, you know—if I would take her out."

"And why does she want to go out there?" Mary asked—her eyes still searching that rocky hill-side for the vanished fugitive.

"To bring back her mother. Sometimes she forgets her fancy about the white bird, and thinks if she could only get out to Heimra she would bring back her mother alive and well. And it is no use trying to undeceive her."

The men were waiting. Mary and Käthchen got into the stern of the boat; the others followed; and presently they were on their way out to the yawl.

"How much bigger she is than I had imagined!" Mary said, as they were drawing near.

And again when they were on deck, looking around with the curiosity that an unknown vessel invariably arouses, she could not but express her high approval: everything looked so trim and neat and ship-shape—the spotless decks, the gleaming brass, the snow-white canvas. And these cushions along the gunwale?

"The fact is," young Ross confessed—with some look of timid appeal towards Mary, "I got the sails up this morning just in case I might be able to induce you to take a bit of a run with us. There is a nice breeze outside, and nothing of a sea. What do you say, Miss Stanley? The *Sirène* feels proud enough that you should have come on board—but if you would like to see how she takes to the water——"

If he was at all anxious, the quick glance of pleasure in Mary's eyes must have instantly reassured him.

"Oh, yes, why not?" said she, rather addressing herself to Kate Glendinning; "I am sure we shall be delighted—if it isn't taking up too much of your time, Mr. Ross——"

"We can slip the moorings and be off at once," said he, and he gave a brief order to the men, himself going to the tiller. In a few minutes the *Sirène* was under way, gliding along so quietly that the two visitors hardly knew that they were moving.

But their departure had not been unnoticed

elsewhere. Suddenly, into the absolute silence prevailing around, there came a piteous wail—a wail so full of agony that immediately all eyes were directed to the shore, whence the sound proceeded. And there the origin of it was visible enough. Anna Chlannach had come down from her hiding-place to the edge of the water; she was seated on a rock, her hands clasped in front of her and her head bent down in an attitude of indescribable anguish, her body swaying to and fro, while from time to time she uttered this heartrending cry, of despair and appeal.

"Poor Anna!" said Mary, with tears starting to her eyes. "Let us go back, Mr. Ross! Never mind us. We can go home. You must take her out to Heimra."

"What would be the use?" he said. "She would only be more miserable, searching about and finding no mother anywhere. And Anna does not keep very long in one mood. She will soon lose sight of us—and then she'll be off again searching for wild strawberries."

And perhaps it was to distract their attention

from this melancholy setting out that he now called one of the men to the tiller, and would have his guests go below, to have a look at the ladies' cabin and the saloon. Of course they were much interested and pleased—admiring the cunning little contrivances for the utilisation of space; while Mary arrived at the conclusion that, if these rooms were kept in order by Calum, Calum was a very handy youth to have in one's service, whether afloat or ashore. They spent some time over these investigations; and when they came on deck again, they found they were well out at sea, with a far-extending view of the high and rocky coast, Lochgarra itself appearing as merely a thin grey-white line along one of those indented bays.

And still, and carelessly, and joyously, they kept on their course, the light breeze holding steady, the wide plain of water shining with a summer blue. Young Donald had not returned to the tiller; he was devoting himself assiduously to his two guests—their conversation, whatever its varying moods, accompanied by the soft, continuous murmur of these myriad-

glancing ripples, for waves they could scarcely be called. And on this occasion Mary was not nearly so nervous, and excited, and wayward as she had been on the previous day; a placid, benign content reigned in her eyes; a sort of serious, bland sweetness in her demeanour. Käthchen thought to herself that she had never seen Mary Stanley look so beautiful, nor yet wearing so serene an air.

And still they held on, in this fair halcyon weather, alone with the sky, and the fresh wind, and the slumberous main; and so entirely and happily engrossed with themselves that they had no thought for the now distant land. But at last Käthchen said—

"Mr. Ross, how far are we going? I thought you were expecting an important letter."

"There are things of equal importance," said he, pleasantly. He cast a glance forward. "Soon we shall be getting near to Heimra, Miss Stanley. I have never had the chance of receiving you in my poor little bungalow: will you go ashore for a while?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, cheerfully. "I should like to renew my acquaintance with Martha; she was exceedingly kind to us when Käthchen and I called."

"And perhaps," said he, "when we get round the point, you wouldn't mind standing up for a few seconds—you and Miss Glendinning?—then Martha will see I have visitors, and will have time to put on her best gown. Otherwise I should get into serious trouble."

And so they sailed into the small, quiet harbour, and eventually got ashore at the little slip, and made their way up to the house. Martha had seen them; here she was in the porch, smiling a welcome, with her grey Highland eyes, to the young master, and also to his guests. These she took possession of—with suggestions of tea.

"No, no, Martha," said Donald Ross, "we are not going to have tea at this time of the day. The young ladies will stay for lunch; and you must do the best you can for us. We will go for a stroll about the island, and be back in an hour or thereabouts."

"Oh, yes, indeed," said the old Highland woman, "but it is a peety I was not knowing before——"

"Martha," said Mary Stanley, interposing, "I dare say Mr. Ross does not understand much about housekeeping. Now, you must put yourself to no trouble on our account. A glass of milk will be quite sufficient."

"Aw, but there will be more than that," the old woman said, and she regarded this beautiful, tall, shining-eyed young creature with a most favouring look, and her speech was soft and propitiating; "it would be strange if there was not more than that in the house, and Mr. Ross bringing his friends with him." And therewith she went away; and presently they heard her sharply calling on the lad Calum, who had come up from the slip, and was hanging about, to be in readiness if he were wanted.

And now as the proud young host led forth his fair guests on an exploration of these winding shores, and tumbled crags, and steep precipices, this island of Heimra looked infinitely more cheerful than it had done on

Mary's previous visit, in the bleak April weather. There was an abundance of rich colour everywhere. The silver-grey rocks, and ruddy-grey rocks, and black-grey rocks were interspersed with masses of purple heather; and other masses there were of tall foxgloves, and bracken, and juniper, and broom. Their progress, it is true, was something of a scramble, for there was no road nor semblance of a road; the sheep tracks, he explained, were up on the higher slopes and plateaus; down here by the shore they had to get along as best they could, though sometimes they had the chance of a space of velvet-soft sand—with the clear green water breaking in crisp white ripples and sparkling in the sun. A solitary, if a picturesque, island, facing those wide western seas; there was no sign of human existence or occupation after they had got out of sight of the single house and its small dependencies; and at last Mary said:

"One would think that no living creature had ever been round this coast before. But it cannot be so wild and lonely to you, Mr. Ross,

as it seems to us; you have discovered all the secrets of it; and so I want you to take me to your grotto. In such an island of Monte Cristo, you must have the grotto of Monte Cristo: where is it?"

"How did you guess?" said he, with a smile.

"Guess what?"

"For there is a grotto," he said, regarding her. "Your surmise is quite correct. There is a grotto; only it isn't filled with sacks of jewels and coins; all that there is in it is some smuggled brandy."

"Oh, really?" she said, with her eyes showing a sudden attention. "Brandy?—smuggled brandy?—and how did it come there?—did you bring it?"

"Indeed I did," said he, without a moment's hesitation—and he was standing in front of her now, for she had sate down on a smooth grey rock. "I suppose I must let you into my dark and terrible secret, and give you the power of sending the Supervisor over, and haling me off to Dingwall. It is not a grotto,

however, it is a cave; and very few people know of its existence. In fact, you can't get to it by the shore at all; you must go by water; and I hope to show it to you some day, if you would care to go round in a boat. But then there are no wonders—no hasheesh—no heaps of diamonds and rubies—only little casks of spirits: perhaps they wouldn't interest you?"

"Oh, but I think they would," she said—and yet with a little caution, for she did not quite know how to take this confession.

He observed her face for a moment.

"I see I must begin and justify myself," said he, lightly, "if justification is possible. For of course it's very wrong and wicked to evade the customs duties of your native land; only in my case there are two or three qualifying circumstances. For one thing, I am a Highlander; and smuggling comes natural to a Highlander. Then I have the proud consciousness that I am circumventing Mr. Purdie—and that of itself is a praiseworthy achievement. You may have heard, Miss Stanley, that Purdie plumes himself on having routed out the very

last of the illicit stills from this country-side—and it was done merely out of ill-will to the people; but he forgot that it is difficult to watch a rough coast like this. I can put a counter-check on Mr. Purdie's zeal. But my real excuse is simply this—the old people about here are too poor to buy spirits of any kind, but especially of a wholesome quality; and it is the only little bit of comfort they have when they are cold and wet, just as it is the only medicine they believe in; and really I think the Government, that gives lavish grants here, there, and everywhere—except here, by the way—I think the Government can afford to wink at such a small trifle. Am I convincing you?" he went on, with a laugh. "I'm afraid you look very stern. Is there to be no palliation?"

Then up and spoke Kate Glendinning, valiantly—

"I consider you are perfectly justified, Mr. Ross; yes, I do, indeed," said she.

"You see I have Miss Glendinning on my side," he pointed out, still addressing Mary.

"Ah, but you are both Highlanders," Mary said, as she rose from the rock; "and how can I argue one against two?"

"Shall I be quite honest," said he, as they were setting out for home again, "and confess that there is a spice of adventure in going away to the south for the cargo, and running it safely here? It is a break in the monotony of one's life on the island."

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder if that had something to do with all those fine reasons," she observed, with demure significance.

"And then," he continued, frankly, and perhaps not noticing her sarcasm, "I like to be on friendly terms with the old people who knew our family in former days. I like them to speak well of me; I like to think that they have some trifle of affection for me. And this is about the only way I can keep up the old relationship that used to exist between them and the 'big house;' it's very little kindness I am able to show them: they've got to take the will for the deed nowadays." He turned to her. "What, not convinced yet?" he said.

laughing again. "What is to be the verdict? Not acquittal?"

She shook her head doubtfully: the Lady Superior of Lochgarra did not choose to say.

They found an excellent lunch awaiting them; and after that, in his eager desire to entertain these rare visitors in every possible way, he showed them the heirlooms of the family, along with a heap of antiquities and curiosities that for the most part had been put away in cabinets and chests, as being out of keeping with these plain rooms. Naturally the old armour interested Mary less than the silks and embroideries, the porcelain and pottery; and in particular was she struck by a Rhodian dish, the like of which she had never seen before. It was of coarse material, and of the simplest design—a plain draught-board pattern, with a free-handed scroll running round the rim; but the curious pellucid green colour was singularly beautiful, and the glaze extraordinarily luminous.

"Where could that have come from?" said she, reluctantly laying it down, and still

regarding it with admiration. "I have never seen one like it in England."

"My father sent it home from Smyrna," he said, simply, "to my mother. He could not live in the West Highlands: the climate did not suit him. He travelled a great deal."

Donald Ross seemed to speak without any restraint or embarrassment; but there was some strange misgiving in Mary's mind; she was glad when Käthchen changed the subject—calling her attention to some exquisite lace.

And at last this wonderful and memorable visit had to come to an end; but when they went out to the little porch Mary said she could not go without saying good-bye to Martha, and so she turned and went through the passage into the kitchen.

"Martha," said she, in her most winning way, and with smiling eyes, "you have been very good to us, and I shall never forget your kindness on our first visit to Heimra, when we were quite strangers to you. And this is a little present I want you to take, as a souvenir, you understand——"

She had unclasped the châtelaine from her belt; and there it was, in antique silver, with all its ornaments and housewifely implements complete, pressed upon the old dame's acceptance. But Martha hung back—shyly—and yet looking at the marvellous treasure.

"Oh, no, mem," she said. "I thank ye; I'm sure I thank ye; but Mr. Ross would not be liking me to tek it."

"Mr. Ross!" said Mary impatiently. "What does Mr. Ross know about such things? Why, it is necessary for your housekeeping, Martha! —and, besides, you must take it to please me; and it will remind you of our visit until we come back again—for I hope to come back and see you some day."

"Yes, yes, and soon, mem," said the grateful Martha, who had been forced into compliance. "And I will be showing it to Mr. Ross, mem——"

"Good-bye, then, Martha, and thank you for all your kindness," said Mary, as she was going.

"No, no, mem, it is my thanks and service

to you, mem," said Martha, and she timidly extended her hand. Mary had learnt the ways of this country. She shook hands with the old dame; and said good-bye again; and went her way.

Then once more over the shining sea, with the light northerly breeze providing them a steady and continuous passage. Mary turned once or twice to look at the now receding island.

"I suppose you get very much attached to a solitary home like that?" she said, absently.

"But I like a few days on the mainland very well," said he, with much cheerfulness, "if there is anything to be done. When do you expect your photographer?"

"To-morrow or next day."

"I will wait for him," said he, promptly.

"That will be very kind of you," said she; "for what would pictures of Lochgarra be to Mrs. Armour if you were not in them?"

"And Saturday is Miss Stanley's birthday," put in Käthchen. "You should stay over for that."

"Saturday?" said he. "Oh, indeed. Oh, really." And then he added: "Why, they must get up a big bonfire on the top of Meall-na-Fearn."

"No, no," said Mary, with an odd kind of look: "that is not for me. I must wait a little for anything of that sort. It must come spontaneously, if ever it comes." And then she suddenly changed her tone. "Well, Mr. Ross, since you are remaining on the mainland for a day or two, I hope you will come and see what I have been doing. I have started a few things——"

"I know more about your work than you think," said he. "But I should be glad to go with you."

"And then perhaps the people won't treat me as a stranger," she said, with a touch of injury in her tone.

"It is very ungrateful of them if they do," said he, with some emphasis.

And so it came about, on the next day, that Lochgarra again beheld the spectacle of Young Donald of Heimra acting as escort to the

English lady, while she was taking him about and showing him all she was doing or trying to do. And to Käthchen it was as clear as daylight that those people began to be a great deal more friendly—more willing to answer questions—more sympathetic in their looks. Why, when the two girls returned home that evening, they found the hall-door open, and Barbara in the act of lifting up two huge stenlock that had been laid on the stone slab.

"Why, what's this, Barbara?" Mary inquired.

"Oh, it's just that foolish lad, the Gillie Ciotach," said Barbara, with a smile of apology, "and he was leaving them here instead of taking them round by the back. He was saying the people are thanking Miss Stanley for the new building and the papers; and he and Archie MacNicol they had a big catch of stenlock, and would Miss Stanley take one or two."

"Do you mean that the Gillie Ciotach brought me those fish as a present?" said Mary, with a delighted surprise—and she was

looking at those big, coarse lythe as if she had just received an Emperor's gift.

"Yes, ma'am," said Barbara.

"But of course you gave him something all the same?"

"Oh, no, ma'am."

"A glass of whiskey, at least?" Mary demanded.

"Oh, no, ma'am," said the soft-spoken Barbara, "there is no whiskey in the house."

"Then it is a shame there should be no whisky in a Highland house!" Mary exclaimed, indignantly. "Why, could you not have run over to your brother's cottage and got some?"

"The Gillie Ciotach was not giving me time, ma'am," answered Barbara, in her pleasant way. "Maybe he was thinking of something of that kind, and he went away quick after leaving the message."

"I'll make it up to the Gillie Ciotach—you will see if I don't!" she said to Käthchen, as they passed through the hall and went upstairs. And all that evening she appeared to be greatly

pleased by this little incident; and spoke of it again and again: why, to her it seemed to presage the pacification of this lawless land—she was going to meet with some return at last.

Moreover, when the photographer at length made his appearance and set to work, it must have appeared to the people about that Donald Ross of Heimra had become the chosen ally and companion of the young Baintighearna; while to Donald Ross himself it seemed as if Mary were bent on representing him—in these views, at least—as the owner of the whole place. And she was wilful and imperative about it, too; though Käthchen, standing by as a spectator, perceived that she had to deal with a nature which, however quiet, was a good deal firmer than her own. For example, one of the first views was the front of Lochgarra House. The artist, having a soul above bare stone and lime, suggested that there should be some figures standing at the open hall-door, on the terrace above the steps.

"Oh, yes, certainly," said Mary at once.

"You go, Mr. Ross, and stand there—will you be so kind?"

"I?" said he, in amazement—for it was clear she meant herself and Kate Glendenning to remain out of the picture—"What should I do there? That is your place, surely—in front of your own house."

"Oh, what does Mrs. Armour want with me!" she protested. "It is you she wants, naturally. Of course she associates Lochgarra House with you, not with me at all. Who am I? A stranger—an interloper. What does Mrs. Armour care about me? No, really, I must insist on your going and standing on the terrace."

"But indeed I cannot: what right have I to be there?" said he, with the faintest touch of colour coming to the keen, pale, dark face.

"Mrs. Armour would tell you you had a better right to be there than I have!" said Mary, rather ruefully. "I knew what she was thinking, if she was kind enough to say nothing. Now, go, Mr. Ross, to please me! I must not appear in this picture at all—indeed, I will not."

"And I cannot," he said, simply.

"Very well, then," said the shifty Käthchen, cheerfully stepping into the breach, "it is evident that I, at least, can't be expected to take up a position as owner of Lochgarra House; but figures are wanted; and so, if you are both resolved to remain out, I will go and get the keepers and gillies and servants, and range them along the front there, at the foot of the steps. I dare say Mrs. Armour will recognise some of them."

"Then you positively refuse me?" Mary said to him.

"You ought to understand why," he answered her—and then she was silent.

But on the following morning she was deeply impressed by his thoughtful forbearance and consideration. They wished to get a view of the little hamlet of Cruagan, Mrs. Armour having lived there formerly; and, as the place was some distance off, they drove thither—the artist and his camera up beside the coachman. Now, it was inevitable they should pass the desert plain that used to be Loch Heimra, with

the tumbled stones of the ancient keep; and on coming in sight of these the photographer, recognising a subject, and yet a little puzzled, called on the coachman to stop.

"That, sir—what is that, sir?" he asked of Donald Ross, whom he generally consulted.

"Oh, that is nothing," said Ross (and this time it was Mary who look distressed and embarrassed). "Never mind; go on."

"Isn't that an old ruin, sir?" said the photographer, with professional instinct. Subjects did not abound in this neighbourhood, and he wished to do his best.

"That is of no use: that would not make a picture—a heap of stones like that," said young Donald; and so the artist gave way; and the carriage went on again. There was a space of silence thereafter.

But Mary was none the less grateful to him. And when they came to a stretch of the Connan, where there were some rocks in mid-stream and a bit of a waterfall, with some birches by the side of the river, she said:

"Now, Mr. Ross, Mrs. Armour is sure to

remember this place; and it is very pretty; and since you want me to come into some of the pictures, I will come in this time, and the three of us can sit on the bank as if we were a pic-nic party. And if it turns out well, mightn't we have it enlarged and some copies printed for our own friends? We will send on the carriage a bit, so that there shall be nothing but ourselves in this solitude."

"Let me go on with the carriage, Mamie!" interposed Käthchen at once.

"Don't be silly, Käthchen!" Mary made answer, with quickly lowered lashes. "We are supposed to be a pic-nic party, or a fishing party, taking a rest—anything you please; but of course we must all be together."

So that group also was taken, with the Highland river-scene for its background; and then they went forward and overtook the carriage. Mary was much more cheerful now, after getting away from that reproachful sight of Castle Heimra.

"Do you know, Mr. Ross," she was saying, "I am about to encounter the bitterest enemy I have in the world?"

"I cannot believe you have any enemy," was his reply. "But who is this?"

"James Macdonald."

"Oh, Macdonald the crofter at Cruagan. Well, what have you been doing to him?"

"What have I been doing to him?" she said with some spirit. "You should rather ask what I have been doing for him. I have been doing far too much for him: I suppose that is why he hates me. What haven't I done for him? I took off the tax for the dyke; I handed over the pasturage of Meall-na-Cruagan; I lowered his rent; I forgave him arrears; I had the decree of removal quashed, and gave him back his holding after he had forfeited it; I stopped the action against him for deforcing the sheriff's officer. What more? What more? And yet he looks as if he would like to murder me if I try to speak to him."

"Have you any idea of the reason?"

"Yes," said Mary, a little proudly. "He says that you are his laird, and not I: he says I have nothing to do with the land or the people here."

"Macdonald is a foolish man—and stubborn: I will talk to him," he said; and he was thoughtful for a second or two.

Indeed, when they arrived at the scattered little hamlet of Cruagan, it was not the sun-pictures that occupied Mary Stanley's attention. The photographer was allowed to choose his subjects as he liked. For, in driving up, they had perceived the sullen-browed, Russian-looking crofter at work in his patch of potatoes; and as soon as the carriage stopped, young Ross left his companions, stepped over the bit of wire fence, and went along the potato drills. Macdonald ceased working, and respectfully raised his cap. Ross began speaking in a low voice, and yet with some emphasis, and increasing emphasis, as the ladies in the waggonette could gather. It was impossible for them to overhear the words, even if they had been able to understand; but as he proceeded it was clear enough that he was becoming angry and indignant, the man with the shaggy eyebrows and the determined jaw having answered once or twice. Then almost suddenly there came a strange

termination to this fierce encounter. Young Ross remained behind, glancing around him as if merely wanting to know whether the crop promised well; but Macdonald came down the drills, in the direction of the carriage.

"Käthchen," said Mary, in an eager whisper, "he is coming to speak to me! Let me get out—quick!"

She stepped into the roadway. As Macdonald came slowly towards her, he raised his eyes and regarded her for a second, in silence. He took off his cap—and forgot to put it on again. He was thinking what to say.

"I—not much English. It is thanks to you—for many things. The young laird says that. And I—am to ask your pardon—and sorry I am if there is not goodwill—and there is goodwill now—and it is sorry I am——"

"Not at all—not at all; we are going to be quite good friends, Mr. Macdonald—and there's my hand on it," said she in her frank, impetuous way. "And you are going to ask me into your house; and will you give me a little bit of oatcake, or something of the kind?—and when you

are next over at Lochgarra you must not forget to come and see me. And at any time, mind you, if you have anything to complain of, come to me first; come direct to me; don't go to Mr. Purdie, or anybody; for perhaps I might be able to settle the matter for you at once."

And with that she called on Mr. Ross, and told him they were going into the cottage to get a bit of oat-cake; for Macdonald was already leading the way thither. When they came out of Macdonald's cottage, they found that the photographer had quite completed his work; so they at once set out for home again. Mary was in an extraordinary state of delight over this vanquishment of her obdurate enemy, and said she should take means to remind him of their compact of goodwill. But young Ross only laughed.

"'Wherefore he called that place Beersheba,'" he said, "'because there they sware both of them.'"

The following Saturday was Mary Stanley's birthday. Early in the morning she and Kate, in fulfilment of a long-standing engagement,

drove away out to Craiglarig to pay a visit to Mr. Watson, and talk over some matters connected with his farm; and as they stayed for lunch, they did not get back till the afternoon. By that time the mail had come in, and there was an astonishing number of letters and parcels addressed to Miss Stanley, for she had a large number of friends in the south, who held her in kindly remembrance. She was looking at these and guessing at the senders, when she came to one that was larger and heavier than the others; moreover, it had not come by post, but by hand. Something impelled her to tear off the brown wrapper, and behold, here was the Rhodian dish she had so particularly admired when they were out at Heimra Island.

"I saw he noticed how long you looked at it," said Käthchen, with smiling eyes.

Well, she did not look at it long now, beautiful as it was. She had turned again to the wrapper, and she seemed to take a curious interest in studying her own name as she found it there.

"It is an unusual handwriting, don't you

think so, Käthchen?" she said, slowly, and almost as if she were talking to herself. "Firm and precise. . . . How odd one's own name appears when you see it written for the first time by some one you know! . . . Do you think character can be read in handwriting, Käthchen? . . . firmness—yes, apparently; and precision—well, I don't object to that so much, . . . but don't you think he is a little too—a little too confident in himself . . . careless of what others may think . . . a little too independent . . . and proud in his own domain?"

"I don't know about that at all. But I am going to tell you something now, and you may be angry or not as you please," said Käthchen; and she went up to her friend, and put her hand on her arm: perhaps she wanted to watch the expression of her face: "Mamie," she said, "that man loves you."

CHAPTER V.

A PIOUS PILGRIMAGE.

All things appeared to be going well at Lochgarra: Mary was radiant and jubilant, and would pay no heed to Käthchen's underhand jibes and warnings. Her numerous schemes were thriving all along the line; she had orders for homespun webs and hand-knitted stockings far beyond what she could execute in the coming winter; she had been guaranteed two fishing-boats, with their furnishing of nets, for the next season; she was in treaty for more looms, for which there would be abundant employment; and to add to all this, the as yet ungarnered harvest—that poor, scattered, patchwork harvest, among the sterile rocks—promised a fair return if only the weather would leave it alone. But it was the attitude

of the people towards her that warmed her heart. Since her open association with young Donald of Heimra, a miracle had been wrought in this neighbourhood; the dumb could speak; men and women who had sulkily turned away from the *ban-sassunnach*, shaking their heads, now managed to find quite sufficient English to answer her, and would ask her into their cottages, and offer her of their little store. Even the sad-faced, silent, morose Peter Grant, of the inn, had been brought to see that there might be something in Miss Stanley's proposals. If he were to take the April fishing on the Garra at an annual rental of £15, she providing a water-bailiff, and if, by advertising in the sporting papers, he were to find two gentlemen who would pay him £25 for the month's salmon-fishing, and use the inn at the same time, would not that serve? Peter (committing one illegal act in order to prevent another) could give an occasional glass of whiskey to the rosy-cheeked policeman: the placid and easy-going Iain, having little else to do, could now and again stroll down to the

bridge of a morning or evening—there would be no fear of poachers at that end of the water.

But it was over the terrible rascal and outlaw, Gillie Ciotach, that she obtained (as she thought) her most signal triumph. She sent for that notorious scamp to thank him for the couple of lythe he had presented to her; and one evening the Gillie Ciotach sauntered along towards Lochgarra House, his fisherman clothes as clean as might be, and a brand-new Balmoral set jauntily on his short brown curls. When he arrived at the house, he dismissed a quid of tobacco he had been chewing, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and ascended the steps. Barbara received him, and went and told her mistress, who directed her to bring some whiskey into the hall. Then Mary came down.

"Good evening!" said she, rather nervously, to this young fellow with the bold brown eyes and the heavy scar across his forehead, who stood twirling his Balmoral in his fingers. "Won't you be seated? I hope I have not put you to any inconvenience. The fact is,

I wished to thank you for your kindness in leaving the two stenlock for me—I am sorry I was out—and—and perhaps you will take a glass of whiskey—will you help yourself?"

For Barbara had brought in a little tray, and placed it on the hall-table, and retired. Now, when the Gillie Ciotach received this invitation, which he had no thought of refusing, he went to the table; and finding there a tumbler, a wineglass, a decanter, and a carafe of water, and being far too polite to think of drinking by himself, he filled the wine-glass with whiskey, and half-filled the tumbler with the same fluid, and brought the former, as being the more elegant of the two, to Miss Stanley.

"Oh, no, thank you," said she, with an involuntary shudder.

"No, mem?" said he, in great surprise. "Well, well, now!" But not to waste good liquor he poured the contents of the wine-glass into the tumbler, and took that between his hands as he sate down, nursing it, as it were, while he listened respectfully.

"But first of all," she said, with a fine effort at jollity and good-comradeship, "I ought to know your real name, you know; I don't consider nicknames fair—even although they may not be meant to be nicknames. And I wish to be good friends with everybody in the place—and to get to know all about them——"

"Aw, my own name?" said the Gillie Ciotach, after having, with careful manners, sipped a little of the whiskey. "Aw, it's just Andrew MacVean."

"Very well, then, Andrew, I am very pleased to see you; and I am sure we shall be friends; and I wished to say, besides, that I hope everything will go peaceably here, and that there will be no more riotous proceedings, like the assault on the lobster-fishermen at Ru Minard——"

"Aw, God, that was a fine thing!" cried the Gillie Ciotach, with a loud laugh that led Mary to suspect he must have had a glass, or even two, before coming along. "Aw, it was a fine thing, that! And Miss Stanley has only to send us word, as she did before, and

we'll drive the squatters into the sea—them and their traps, and their huts, ahltogether into the sea! Never mind where they settle! —you send to me, mem, and we will drive the duvvles into the sea, and let them tek their chance of swimming the Minch!——"

"But what do you mean?" she said, angrily. "What word did I send you? Do you imagine I authorized those mad and cruel proceedings? I bade Big Archie tell those men what the Fishery Board had said—that they had no right there; I did not ask you to drive the poor men out with sticks and stones, and set fire to their huts with petroleum. I don't want any such on-goings: why, it is monstrous that the people should take the law into their own hands, and get the neighbourhood a bad name for rioting."

"It's the God's truth, mem, and many's the time I was telling them that," said the Gillie Ciotach, solemnly. "But ye see, mem, there's some wild duvvles about here; and they're neither to hold nor to bind; but I'll tell them what Miss Stanley says, that there's to be no

more fighting; and if a man is determined to fight, then we'll chist fell him with a chair, and fling him below the table until he gets sober. It's a peaceable neighbourhood: why should there be any fighting in it?—but for these duvvles!——"

"I am glad you think so," said Mary, very gratefully. "And then there's another thing—the poaching. Now, is it fair? I ask you if it is fair——"

"It's a b——y shame!" said the Gillie Ciotach to himself, as he bent his head to sip a little more whiskey.

"Because look what I am doing, Andrew," she went on, probably not having heard the penitent exclamation. "I want you to understand. I am having the ground shot over, moderately, by the keepers, and the game sent to Inverness and sold there to pay wages, and the cost of the kennels, and so on; and in that way I can afford to keep the gillies in employment. And I do think it is hardly fair that there should be poaching. *I* get no good out of the game—except a bird or two now and

again for the house, or a brace or two to send away. Of course, I don't believe that there is very much poaching—for the keepers know their business too well; but it is disgraceful there should be any——"

"I declare to ye, mem," said the Gillie Ciotach, in tones of the most earnest conviction, "that if I was to come across one of them d——d scoundrels—I beg your pardon, mem—I meant to say there was one or two bad men about here, that mebbe would tek a hare if they found her sitting in her form—or—or a salmon; and as sure's death, mem, if I was to catch one of them scoundrels, I would bind him hand and foot with a heather rope, and I would fling him down in front of Hector's cottage, and I would say 'Hector, off with him to Dingwall!'"

This was almost too much of zeal.

"Andrew," said she, slowly, and she looked at him, "I have heard it said that even you yourself——"

"Me, mem?" he exclaimed, quick to repel this unspoken accusation. "Me, mem? Aw,

Miss Stanley is not going to believe that! There's a great many liars about here, mem, and there's not one of them I would believe myself; and tekking away any one's character like that! I would just like to brek the bones of any one that I heard talking like that about me—begooh, I would shove his teeth down his throat!"

"Well, I won't detain you any longer, Andrew," said she—and he drained off the whiskey, and smoothed out the ribbons of his Balmoral. "I am glad to hear that there is to be no more fighting or poaching; for I want the neighbourhood to have a good name; and there are plenty of other and better occupations for the young men."

She went with him to the door. Suddenly something seemed to occur to the Gillie Ciotach.

"Would Miss Stanley be caring for two or three sea-trout now and again?" said he, in a casual kind of way.

Instantly she fixed her eyes on him.

"Sea-trout?—where are you getting sea-

trout, Andrew?" she demanded. "Do you mean to say you have a scringe-net?"

For one brief moment the Gillie Ciotach looked disconcerted and guilty; but only for a moment.

"Aw, no, mem. A scringe-net? Is it a scringe-net? Aw, I'm sure there's no one would use a scringe-net about here!" he declared, assuming further and further an air of innocence as he went on. "The sea-trout?—well, mebbe they would be in the herring-nets—and mebbe a happening one would come on to the bait-lines—and—and mebbe the one way or the other; but if Miss Stanley not wishing to have them——"

"Why, isn't this the very time they go up the rivers to spawn!" she exclaimed. "And what a shame it would be to take them now!"

"Indeed, indeed, and that's the God's truth, mem," said the Gillie Ciotach, with a serious air. "It's at this very moment. And who would tek them? Who would put a scringe-net round the mouth of the ruvvers at a time of the year like this? Not a man about here,

anyway. Aw, sea-trout?—who would think of tekkin sea-trout now? Well, good evening, mem; and I am thanking Miss Stanley for her kindness—yes, yes, indeed."

And therewith the Gillie Ciotach went down the steps, fumbling in his pocket for his pipe; while Mary returned to relate the story of this momentous interview to Käthchen—perhaps with some few judicious reservations. For if all that the Gillie Ciotach professed was not quite to be believed, at least it was something that so desperate a dare-devil had the grace to affect being on the side of virtue; and Mary chose to flatter herself that, now he had shown himself in a measure amenable, she would sooner or later complete his conversion—to the general quieting of the country-side.

And of course an account of this, her latest conquest, had to be written out forthwith and despatched to Heimra. Indeed, it was remarkable how constant had become the communication between the island and the shore, now that Donald Ross had returned for a few days to his own home. Big Archie's lugger was

continually being requisitioned, to take out a note and wait for an answer; while Coinneach and Calum, when they came to meet the mail, would be intercepted by the swift-footed Barbara, and entrusted with a message. Käthchen was convinced that the replies that came back from Eilean Heimra were kept and secretly pondered over: more than once she had seen Mary thrust a paper into her pocket when someone had suddenly come upon her. And she noticed that when they two were walking along the shore, her companion's attention would sometimes be so steadily and wistfully fixed on the distant island—which sometimes was dark and misty under trailing clouds of rain, and sometimes shining fair amid a wonder of blue seas and sunlight—that when she was spoken to she would look startled, as if summoned out of a dream.

One day there arrived, addressed to Miss Stanley, a wooden box that had the name of a well-known London florist printed on the label. The contents were a mass of flowers, all of them white; and Mary herself saw them

taken out and carefully placed in water—for the pale wax-like buds of the tuberoses were hardly yet opened. Then she went to Kate Glendinning.

"Käthchen," she said, rather diffidently, "don't you think it is rather a sad thing, the lonely grave out there?"

"Do you mean at Heimra, Mamie?"

"Yes. It seems so hard that no one has ever a chance of showing sympathy—either with the dead or living. I have sent for some flowers; do you think we could go out and place them on the grave—without being seen?"

Käthchen was silent: it did not appear a very feasible project.

"I have been thinking it over," Mary continued, in the same humbly apologetic, almost shamefaced way—though what there was to be ashamed of Käthchen could not make out. "And, you see, if we landed at the little bay, he would be sure to come down to meet us, and —and we should have to tell him—and—and there are things you can't speak of. I would rather have this done quite unknown—as if it

were by the hand of a stranger: perhaps I should like it better if Mr. Ross himself never knew. However, I was wondering if we could not get out to the west coast of the island without being seen, and then if there was a chance of our being able to get up to the top of the cliff that way. What do you think, Käthchen?"

"Let us go along and ask Big Archie," said Käthchen, with promptitude: and that suggestion commending itself to her friend, both of them at once went off and got ready, and proceeded to walk down through the village.

Big Archie they found on the beach, screwing the nails into a lobster-box. Käthchen put the matter briefly before him—telling him frankly the object of the expedition, and explaining their reasons for secrecy. The huge, heavy-shouldered fisherman listened attentively, stroking his voluminous beard the while.

"Well, mem," said he, in his plaintive Argyllshire intonation, "I am thinking it would be easy enough to get out to the island, for we could go round by the norse side. If the wind wass holding as it is now, we would lie aweh

up the coast there, and if anyone on Heimra wass seeing the lugger, they would think I wass mekkin for the Eddrachilles fishing-banks ; and then, when we were far enough we would put about and run down to the back of the island, and mek in for the shore. I am thinking there would be no diffeekwulty about that—aw, no, mem ; we could get round to the back of the island ferry well ; but it is the next thing that would be the sore thing for leddies to try——"

"You mean climbing up to the top of the cliff?" said Käthchen.

"Chist that! It's a terrible rough place the west side of Heimra," said Gilleasbuig Mòr. "And where the big white stone is, it is fearful high."

"Mamie," said Käthchen, turning to her friend, "wouldn't it be better for you to send Archie out with some young lad who is used to the coast, and they could put the flowers on the grave for you?"

"I wish to place them there with my own hand," said Mary, simply. "But you needn't come, Käthchen."

"Of course I will, though!"

"Well, mem," said Big Archie, "I am not sure whether you will be able to get to the top that way, but we can go out and see whatever. And if the wind would hold till to-morrow morning, it would be a very good wind, both for going and coming."

"Very well, then, Archie," said Mary; "to-morrow morning we shall be ready to start between nine and ten."

The wind did hold, as it proved; and long before the young ladies made their appearance Big Archie and his assistant had the lugsail hoisted and the cumbrous craft smartened up as much as might be. Then he sent the lad along to Lochgarra House to see if there was anything to be fetched; but there was only a couple of waterproofs; when Mary and her friend came out, the former was herself carrying a small basket, containing the freshly-sprinkled flowers.

And so they set forth—making away in a north-westerly direction, which would have led anyone to imagine they were either going to certain well-known fishing-banks or

that they intended to pay some visit not at all in the Heimra direction. But when at length they had got well out beyond the most northerly spur of the island, Big Archie altered his course, and bore down south, until they were quite near to these giant ramparts facing the Atlantic main. And already it appeared to the two girls that this expedition of theirs was a quite hopeless one. They were, it is true, under the lee of the island, and the water was smooth, so that they could get ashore wherever they wished; but who could scale those sterile and sombre precipices that, further to the south, rose sheer from the water, and seemed to afford not even foothold for a goat? Even Big Archie was discouraged.

"No, mem," he said to Miss Stanley, "it is no use going aweh down there to where the big white stone is. There's no luvvin crayture could get up—it's far worse than I wass remembering it. But if we went ashore here where we are, and tried to get up one of them corries, then mebbe we could get along the top. Will ye try that, mem?"

"Whatever you like, Archie," said she—the aspect of that frowning, lonely, precipitous coast seemed to have overawed her.

And indeed when they did eventually choose a landing-place, and when they began to look around them, the arduous nature of their task became abundantly apparent. First of all there were the tumbled rocks on the shore to be got over or avoided; then they proceeded up a narrow watercourse that here cleaved the land into a deep ravine; and this they ascended for some distance, scrambling up the loose wet shingle and stones. Big Archie led the way, and also he carried the little basket, for the two girls had frequently need of both hands to help them along, especially when they left the watercourse, and began to force a path through the stunted birches that lined the sides of the chasm. It was a thicket of short trees, with intertwisted branches; while underfoot the long heather and bracken concealed loose, angular stones perilous to the ankle. Sometimes they had to pause, from absolute want of breath; and Big Archie, looking back, would also stop.

But no one made any suggestion of giving up: there must be light and open space somewhere, if only one could win to the summit.

So they toiled and toiled on, in silence, startling now a fox and now a rabbit, until, at length, the stunted trees gave way to bushes, and these in turn gave way to knee-deep heather. It was still difficult to get along; but at least they had reached the open, and were presumably approaching the high plateaus: turning, they could look abroad over the wide Atlantic, the vast plain not showing one single ship. Their own boat, far below, was out of sight, so steep was this ascent they had made.

Here they rested for a minute or two, after their long and breathless struggle.

"One thing is quite certain, Mamie," said Käthchen, in rather a low voice, so that the big fisherman should not overhear, "When Mr. Ross finds these flowers on the grave, he will know very well who put them there."

"I am not sure that I want him to know," Mary answered, in an absent way. "I think

I almost wish he were not to know. If he were to consider it merely a little kindness from some stranger—that would be better, it seems to me—it would be quite disinterested——"

"Why, what stranger could have managed to land on Heimra without being seen?" Käthchen asked; and as there was no answer to the question, they resumed their difficult progress, getting momentarily higher as they went along the summit of the cliffs.

But all at once Big Archie, who was some distance in front, halted, ducked his head, and immediately turned and came back.

"Miss Stanley, mem, Mr. Ross himself is there," said he.

"Mr. Ross!" said she, with frightened eyes.

"Ay. He is sitting on the heather, not far from the big white stone, and he is reading a book," said Big Archie. "He is often up there, mem. I am seeing him often and often when I am going by in the boat."

Mary turned to her companion, with her face aghast.

"We must go away back, Käthchen, and at

once," she said, in a hurried undertone. "The embarrassment would be too dreadful. If he could imagine it was some stranger brought the flowers, that would be all right; but to go up to him—before his face—to make a parade—he would wonder what kind of creatures we were."

Käthchen hardly knew what to say. She had no more mind to go forward than her friend had; and yet she guessed with what a heavy heart, with what regretful lookings-back, Mary would set out on her voyage home again.

"Let us sit down and rest awhile," she said, at a venture.

But at this very instant Big Archie returned.

"Mr. Ross, mem, he has got up, and he is going aweh down the hill," he said, in an eager whisper.

"You are sure he is not coming this way?" she said, quickly.

"No, no, mem—come a bit forrit, and you will see."

So they followed, with rather timorous steps and anxious glances, the big fisherman; and at last they just caught a glimpse of Donald Ross

making his way down the hill by the winding pathway leading up to this little plateau. And here was the large white block of marble, with its deep-graven letters of gold shining in the sunlight. Mary regarded this inscription with some curious fancies in her mind.

"I wish I had known her," she murmured, apparently to herself, as she took the white flowers out of the basket and reverently placed them on the stone. It was a simple ceremony—up here on the lofty crest of this solitary island, between the wide, over-arching sky and the far-extending plain of the sea.

Then they went back along these silent and lonely cliffs, and got down to the boat in safety; returning to the mainland, as they hoped, unobserved. Mary Stanley was unusually absorbed and thoughtful during the rest of that day; and only once did she refer to their visit to Heimra.

"It seems strange, Käthchen, does it not," she said, musingly, "that he should go away up there to read? . . . Do you think it is perhaps for some sense of companionship? . . .

That would be strange, wouldn't it, in a young man? . . ." And Käthchen did not venture to reply: she could not even conjecture what secret influences, what mysterious cogitations, might not have prompted such a question.

But Kate herself grew to wonder whether Donald Ross had become aware of that thoughtful little act of kindness and sympathy; and whether, and in what way, he would make recognition of it. This was what happened. Some two days after their visit to the island Mary chanced to be standing at one of the windows, when she suddenly called to her companion—

"Käthchen, there's a boat coming out from Heimra."

She went quickly and got her binocular telescope, and returned to the window.

"It's the *Sirène!*" she exclaimed.

"He has seen those flowers," Kate Glendinning said quietly.

Mary turned to her friend, with something of concern in her look.

"And if he has, Käthchen, I hope he won't

speak of them. Don't you think it would be better—if nothing were said? Besides, you don't know that he is coming here at all."

But there was little doubt; and, in fact, on getting ashore, young Ross made straight for the house. When he was announced in the drawing-room, Mary happened to be standing near the door—perhaps with the least touch of conscious colour in the beautiful face. He, on the contrary, was pale, and calm, and self-possessed as usual; only, when he took her hand in his, he held it for a second.

"I thank you," he said, in rather a low voice: that was all—and it was enough.

But presently it appeared that his visit had some other aim; for when he sate down they saw that he had brought a small parcel with him; and presently he said—

"I am going to ask a favour of you, Miss Stanley; and I hope you won't refuse. I have brought a little present, if you will be so kind as to accept it: you may look on it as a souvenir of your visit to Heimra—for perhaps you remember the piece of lace you looked at——"

She remembered very well; it was the exquisite Spanish mantilla to which Käthchen had drawn her attention. And it was not because this sumptuous piece of work was of great value that she hesitated about accepting it: would it not look like despoiling the dead woman? Instantly he appeared to divine her thought.

"If my mother were alive," he said, simply, "she would ask you to take it—and from her, not from me."

So there was no alternative: Mary silently accepted the gift. Nor was there any further word or hint on either side about that pious and secret pilgrimage to Heimra Island; but Donald Ross knew whose hand it was that had placed those flowers on the white grave.

One evening, about this time, two men were dining together in the Station Hotel, Inverness, in a corner of the long coffee-room; and these two were Mr. David Purdie, solicitor and agent, and Mr. James Watson, who was on his way through to his sheep-farm of Craiglarig.

But if they were dining together, their fare was very different; for while the fresh-complexioned, twinkling-eyed farmer was content with such simple vegetarian dishes as an ordinary hotel could devise at short notice, the Troich Bheag Dhearg was attacking an ample plateful of boiled beef and carrots, while a decanter of port stood near to his elbow.

"Man, Watson," said the factor, with an expression of impatient disgust on his harsh, ill-tempered features, "I wonder to see ye swallowing that trash! It's not food for human beings. Have ye been so long among sheep that ye must imitate their very eating?"

"It's live and let live, each in his own way," said the well-contented sheep-farmer; and then he added: "But tell me this, friend Purdie: if ye object to my eemitating a sheep, what kind o' animal is't you eemitate? For there's only one kind o' crayture I've heard o' that would eat a dead cow—and that's a hoodie crow."

But this was an incidental remark: presently they returned to their main object, which was the condition of Lochgarra.

"It's just terrible to think of," said the Little Red Dwarf, with his mouth as vindictive as the process of eating would allow; "it's just terrible to think of, the waste and extravagance going forward, on what used to be a carefully-ordered, carefully-kept estate. And the pampering o' they idle, whining, deceitful, ill-thrawn wretches, that would be the better of a cat-o'-nine tails to make them work! Work? Not them!—if they can get money out o' the proprietors or out o' the Government, or out o' the rates. And what could ye expect to happen wi' a silly, ignorant woman coming into such a nest of liars, and believing everything she hears? What could ye expect? Born liars every one o' them—ay, from end to end of the West Highlands: there's not a man o' them that would not lie the very soul out o' his body for a dram of whisky!"

"That's an old contention o' yours, friend Purdie," said the farmer; and then he proceeded, with a twinkle of humour in his eyes: "But I'll just tell ye this, man, that it's a mercy there's one thing in the West High-

lands that will not lie. One thing at least, I tell ye. Among the universal lying, isn't it a mercy there's one thing will *not* lie—and that's the snow. It's a blessing for the sheep—and for the sheep-farmers."

"And what am I? Where am I?" resumed Mr. Purdie, paying no heed to this little jocosity, for his small, piggish eyes had grown heated with anger and indignation. "What is my poseetion? I ask ye that. What have I to do wi' the estate except to collect what rent there is left? It's this fashionable young dame that must come in to manage the place, snipping off here and snipping off there, ordering this and ordering that, building byres and sheds for nothing, and putting advertisements in the papers about druggets and blankets to sell, as if Lochgarra House was a warehousemen's shop. I tell ye, it's enough to make her uncle turn in his grave. *He* knew better how to dale wi' they ill-thrawn paupers! And what will she not give them, after giving them Meall-na-Cruagan?—and that without consulting any one—no 'by your leave' or

'with your leave,' but 'this is what I have decided, and you can carry it out like a clerk.' Man, Watson, ye were a silly creature to consent to that Meall-na-Cruagan business! That was but a beginning—where is to be the end? Well, I'll tell ye the end! She'll snip here, and snip there, until she has divided every acre of ground among the crofters; and then, when they've resolved among themselves to pay no more rent, I suppose they'll be happy. No, d——n them if they will!—they'll want her to sell Lochgarra House, and give them the money to buy more stock." And here Mr. Purdie poured himself out a glass of port, and gulped it as a dog grabs at a rat.

"Ye've never forgiven the folk out there," said Mr. Watson, with an amused and demure air, "since the procession and the burning in effigy. Dod, that was a queer business!—I heard of it away up in Caithness. But I'm thinking ye might let bygones be bygones; ye've had them under your thumb a good while now—and—and—well, ye might consider that ye've paid off that score. But as for the young

leddy—well, I tell ye, friend Purdie, it's just wonderful what she has done since she cam' to the place. A busy, industrious creature; ay, and she has a way of talking folk over to her way of thinking; she seems to get on famously wi' them, though they cannot have too friendly recollections of her uncle. Yes, I will say that for her: an active, well-meaning creature; and light-hearted as a lintie; dod, she takes her own way, and gets it too! But I'm thinking there's a great deal owing to young Mr. Ross—he goes about wi' her just conteenually."

"Ay," said the factor, with a malignant scowl, "I'm told my young gentleman doesna shut himself up as much wi' his brandy-drinking as he used to do. So he comes over to the mainland sometimes, and goes about wi' her, does he?"

"Faith, ye may say that," Mr. Watson made answer, with a laugh. "They're just insayperable, as ye might say, any time that he comes over from Heimra, and that's often enough." He regarded the factor curiously. "Purdie, my man, that's going to be a match."

For a second Purdie looked startled and incredulous, but instantly he lowered his eyes again.

"It's a match, Purdie, depend on't," Mr. Watson proceeded, still looking at his companion with an odd sort of scrutiny. "And I have been thinking, if such a thing were to come about, it might be a wee bit difficult for you—with young Ross the master at Lochgarra, eh? What d'ye think? Dod, ye'd have to make friends with him and keep a civil tongue besides, or he might be for bringing up old scores."

Mr. Purdie's dinner did not seem to interest him much after that. He remained plunged in a profound reverie, with his truculent mouth drawn down, the shaggy red eyebrows shading the small irascible eyes that were now grown intent and thoughtful. And when at length Mr. Watson haled him off to the smoking-room he did not speak for some considerable time. But by and by he said—

"Are ye off by the early train to-morrow, Watson?"

"Yes, indeed.'

"And you go right through?"

"Just that."

"Well, I think I'll bear ye company," said the Troich Bheag Dhearg, with the heavily down-drawn mouth expressing something more than mere decision. "There's a few things I want to see to. And I havena been out to Lochgarra for some time."

CHAPTER VI.

HABET!

MARY went singing through the house: her step free and agile, her face radiant, her eyes shining with good-humour and the delight of life.

"Käthchen," she said, one morning, "the proofs of the photographs should come to-day, and if they turn out well I mean to have the whole of them enlarged, every one of them, to make a handsome series for Mrs. Armour. Don't you think they should be very interesting to those people away over there—'where wild Altama murmurs to their woe'? Woe, indeed! I wish we could import some of their woeful circumstances into this neighbourhood. Forty bushels of wheat to the acre: what do you say to that? A hundred and sixty acres of land

for two pounds! I don't like to think of it, Käthchen: to tell you the truth, I just hate to hear Mr. Ross begin and talk about emigration: it all sounds so horribly reasonable, and practicable, and right. Sometimes I lie awake convincing myself that the very next day or the next again he will make his appearance with the announcement that he has decided to go back to his original intention; and then—then he will say good-bye to Lochgarra—he and half the people from about here—and be off to the Gilbert Plains or the Lake Dauphin District——"

"You need not be afraid," said Käthchen, quietly. "It is neither wheat-fields nor gold-fields that are likely to allure Mr. Ross. There's metal more attractive nearer home. By the way, Mamie," she continued, with a certain significance, "you remember there was a group taken on the banks of the Connan—and you and Mr. Ross are standing together. When you get the pictures enlarged, are you going to send any copies of that one to your friends in the south?"

"Why not?" said she, boldly.

"They may draw conclusions," said Kate Glendinning, looking at her.

"They are welcome to draw a cart-load of conclusions!" she retorted; but all the same she changed the subject quickly. "Do you know, Käthchen, it is quite wonderful how easily things go forward when Donald Ross is helping me. Look at the wood-carving class—started in a moment, almost; and that left-handed rascal turning out the cleverest of any of them. And then he is quite of a mind with me about corrugated iron——"

"You mean Mr. Ross, Mamie?" said Kate, demurely.

"Of course. Quite of a mind with me as to corrugated iron; and I won't have a square yard of it in the place. If, as he says, thatch takes too much time and labour, then they may have slates for their roofs, in place of the turf that I hope to see the last of before I have done with them; but not an inch of corrugated iron—not an inch. Oh, I tell you we will have Lochgarra smartened up in course of time, and

Minard and Cruagan too. And I will never rest, Käthchen, I tell you I will never rest until Lochgarra has taken the first prize at the Inverness Exhibition—I mean for the best suit of men's clothes made from the wool of sheep fed on the croft, and carded, dyed, spun, hand-loom woven, and cut and sewn in the family. There! It may be a long time yet, but I mean Lochgarra to have it in the end."

"Oh, but you must not stop at that point," said Käthchen. "There are a whole heap of things to be done before you have finally established your earthly paradise. You must banish all sickness and illness—but especially rheumatism. You must abolish old age. You must control the climate to suit the crops. Perhaps you could magnetise the herring-shoals, and bring them round this way, and ward off storms at the same time?"

"Käthchen," said Mary abruptly, "why does he keep harking back on Manitoba? Don't you think there is a curious tenacity about his mind?—he does not change plans or opinions quickly. And I know he was resolved on that

emigration scheme. Why does he still talk about Manitoba? If he really has abandoned that project, why does he still keep thinking about Portage, and La Prairie, and Brandon? Of course, I admit that a hundred and sixty acres for two pounds is very tempting; and forty bushels of wheat to the acre sounds well; and I have no doubt the emigrants have better clothes, and better food, and better cottages, and that they don't run such risks from floods and rain. But still—still there's something about one's own country——"

"You need not be afraid, Mamie," said Kate Glendinning again.

Mary went to the window, and remained there for a minute or two, looking absently across the wide plain of the sea.

"After all," she said, "it is a very pleasant and comfortable thing to have a neighbour. Heimra is a good way off; but all the same, if you knew there was no one living on the island, Lochgarra would be a very different place, wouldn't it, Käthchen? And Manitoba! Why, I have seen it stated that there is a most

serious scarcity of water in a great many of the districts; and that often they have summer frosts that do incalculable mischief to the grain. So you see it isn't a certainty!"

"No, it is not," said Käthchen; "but I will tell you what is, Mamie. It is a certainty, an absolute certainty, that Donald Ross of Heimra will not go to Manitoba, or to any other corner of Canada, so long as Mary Stanley is living in Lochgarra."

"Käthchen," rejoined Mary, a little proudly, "you will go on talking like that until you believe what you say."

This same afternoon, shortly after luncheon, Mary left the house alone, which was unusual. She passed down through the village, greeting everyone, right and left, with a fine cheerfulness; for the weather still held good, and there was a fair chance for the harvest; while her individual schemes and industries were doing as well as could be expected. In fact, the only idle person in the place, apart from the aged and infirm, appeared to be John the policeman, and him she found by the bridge that crosses

the Garra—no doubt he had been amusing himself by watching for some lively salmon or sea-trout on its way up the river. Iain seemed to have grown plumper and more roseate than ever in these piping times of peace; and the smile with which he greeted the young proprietress was good-nature itself.

"John," said she, "I want you to tell me something."

"Aw, yes, mem," said the amiable John; and then he added: "but the lads hef been keeping very quiet."

"So I hear," she answered him. "The Gillie Ciotach says he will smash the head of anyone that wants to fight; and I suppose that is one way to stop quarrelling."

John laughed, showing his milk-white teeth.

"A very good weh, too, mem. There's not many would like to hef their head brokken by the Gillie Ciotach."

"It is not about that I want you to give me some information," said Miss Stanley. "I want you to tell me if you have been long in this place. I mean, do you remember the old castle,

up there in the loch, before it was pulled down?"

"Aw, yes, mem, yes, indeed," he made answer. "Who does not remember Castle Stanley?"

"Oh, nonsense with your Castle Stanley!" she said, angrily. "It never was Castle Stanley, and never will be Castle Stanley. It was Castle Heimra; and if I could have my way it would be Castle Heimra again——"

"Aw, yes, mem," said John, anxious to please, "who would be for calling it Castle Stanley? It is not Castle Stanley at ahl; it's just Castle Heimra, as it always was—ay, before any one can remember."

"Well, tell me; what size of a place was it before it was pulled down? Was it a big place?"

"Big!" repeated John, doubtfully, for he did not know which way she wished to be answered.

"Yes, was it a great ruin?" she went on. "Some of those old castles are mere towers, you know; and others are great strongholds.

What was Castle Heimra like? Was it as big as Ardvreck?"

Now John had jumped to the conclusion that she wished to have the ancient glories of Castle Heimra magnified.

"Aw, far bigger nor Ardvreck!" he asserted confidently. "Aw, yes, yes; far bigger nor Ardvreck. A fearful big place, Castle Heimra —if you had seen the dingeons, and the towers, and the windows, and everything——"

"Oh, bigger than Ardvreck?" Mary said, with fallen face. And instantly John perceived that he had erred.

"Aw, no, mem," said he quickly. "Mebbe it was bigger nor Ardvreck at one time—that is a long time ago, before anyone about here can remember; but Castle Heimra?—aw, no!—a smahl place, a smahl place, indeed! There was nothing but the road out to it, when the loch was not too high flooded; and then the arch-way, and the dingeon, and the tower. Castle Heimra!—aw, it's a smahl place was Castle Heimra."

"And do you suppose it could be built up

again?" she asked—but rather to see how far his complaisance would carry him.

"Quite easy!" said John, without a moment's hesitation.

"Why, how do you know?" she demanded. "Are you a builder?"

"The stons are there," John pointed out. "And if they were pulled down, it is easy to put them back. What has been done once can be done twice."

"Ah, but it would not be Castle Heimra," Mary said to herself, rather sadly, as she went on her solitary way.

In course of time she came within view of the desolate expanse of mud and stones and rushes that had once been Heimra loch; and when she chose out for herself a seat on a heathery hillock close to the road, there before her were the tumbled ruins of the stronghold that had withstood the storms of centuries only to fall before the withering blast of one man's spite. And as she sate there, alone, in the absolute silence, a kind of desperation came into her mind. In all other directions there was

hope for her; but here there was none. Elsewhere she could labour, and patiently wait for fruition; but how was she to drag back the past? The future had abundant and fair possibilities within it; and she was naturally sanguine; her happiness consisted in action; and perhaps she was looking forward to the time when she could say to her lover, 'See, this is what I have striven to do—for your people: is it well or ill?' But as between him and her, would there not be ever and always the consciousness of this black deed that could in no wise be recalled or atoned for, that could never be forgiven or forgotten? She was not even allowed to speak: he had declined to hear her shamefaced expressions of sorrow. Nay, she began to think he was too proud, too implacable, that he would have no word uttered. And if she went to him and said: 'Donald, do not blame me!—I had no part in it: I would give my right hand to undo what has been done'—would not his looks still remain haughty and cold, telling her that she had not ceased to be the *ban-sassunnach*—a stranger—the enemy of his race and name?

There was a sound of wheels. She started to her feet, for there were tears in her eyes that she had to hide. The approaching vehicle turned out to be the mail-car; and on it were Mr. Purdie and Mr. Watson, seated beside the driver. Both of them raised their hats to her, and would doubtless have driven on, but that she called to the factor; whereupon the mail-car was stopped, and Mr. Purdie descended.

"Leave my bag at the inn, Jimmie," he said to the driver, who sent his horses on again: then the Troich Bheag Dhearg came along to the spot at which Mary awaited him.

"I wish to speak to you about one or two things, Mr. Purdie," she said, in a curiously reserved and frigid fashion. "You told me it was under your direction that the loch here was drained. I do not know whether my uncle was acting on the advice or suggestion of any one; I can hardly believe that so insensate a piece of malice could have entered his head without instigation. And if there was instigation, if this thing was done out of ill-will towards the Rosses of Heimra, then I say it was a cowardly

blow—a mean, shameless, and cowardly blow!" Her lips were a little pale; but she was apparently quite calm.

"It was just the thrawn nature of the people about here that brought it on themselves," said the Little Red Dwarf, sullenly. "The Rosses of Heimra had no further concern with the loch and the castle, once the property was sold. They belonged to your uncle: surely it was for him to say what they should be called? Surely he had the right to do what he liked with his own?"

"In this instance," said Mary, still preserving that somewhat cold and distant demeanour, "what he did has got to be undone, as far as that is now possible. I suppose it would be useless to try and rebuild the castle. Even if the stones were put up again, it would hardly be Castle Heimra. But Loch Heimra can be restored to what it used to be; and since the mischief was done under your direction, Mr. Purdie, you can now take steps to repair it."

"Bless me, Miss Stanley," the factor protested, "it would be quite useless—perfectly

useless! The loch was never worth anything to anybody. Salmon cannot get up; and there was nothing in it but a wheen brown trout——"

"It is not the value of the loch I am considering," she rejoined. "I wish to make some reparation, as far as I can. And I suppose if those channels you had cut were partially blocked up, the water from the hills would soon fill the lake again. Or you could bring the Connan round in this direction with very little trouble, and let it find its way down to the Garra after going through the loch——"

"The expense, Miss Stanley!—the expense!"

"I tell you I will have this done, if I have to sell Lochgarra House to do it!" she said—forgetting for a moment her austere demeanour. The factor had no further word. Mary went on: "It cannot be a difficult thing to do, any more than the draining was difficult; and it will give employment to some of the people, when the harvest is in and the fishing season over. So you'd better see about it at once, Mr. Purdie; and make arrangements. And there is to be no more talk of Loch Stanley or of

Castle Stanley either; this is Loch Heimra; and if Castle Heimra has been pulled down —shamefully and wickedly pulled down—at least there are the ruins to show where it stood."

The factor remained darkly silent, his vindictive mouth drawn down, his small eyes morose. And little did she know what gall and wormwood she had poured into his heart, in directing him to employ those very Lochgarra people in this work of restoration. However, he made no further protest: indeed, he endeavoured to assume an air of hopeless acquiescence—it was his business to obey orders, even if she should bring the whole estate to waste and ruin.

But as they together set out to return to the village, and as she was talking over general business affairs with him, explaining what she had done and what she meant to do, he could not quite conceal his bitter resentment.

"It seems to me, Miss Stanley, that I am hardly wanted here. A strange condeetion of affairs. The factor the very last one to be con-

sulted. And when I think of the way ye allow these people to impose on ye—well, maybe I'm not so much astonished; for what could one expect?—you come here an absolute stranger, and you wish to do without them that have experience of the place, and of course you believe every tale that is told ye. Though I say it who maybe should not, Lochgarra was a well-managed estate; everything actually valued, and in order; and the tenants, large and small, knowing fine that they had to fulfil their contracts, or take the consequences. But what prevails now? A system of wholesale charity, as it seems to me. It is giving everything, and getting nothing. I hope, Miss Stanley," he went on, "ye will not mind my speaking warmly; for I've done my best for my employers all my life through; and I cannot be supposed to like other ways and means—which were never contemplated by the law of the land. If the other proprietors were to go on as you are doing, there's three-fourths o' them would be in beggary—— "

"It might do them good to try a little of it,"

said she—which was an odd speech for the owner of a considerable estate.

"And what has been the result?" he demanded. "What has been gained by so much sacrifice?"

"Well," said she, "for one thing, the people are more contented. And they are more friendly towards me. When I came here at first I was hated; now I am not so much so. Quite friendly most of them are—or, at least, they appear to be."

"Ay, trust them for that!" said the Little Red Dwarf, scornfully. "Trust them for that—the cunningest mongrels that ever whined for a bone! Well they know how to fawn and beslaver, when they're expecting more and more. I tell ye, Miss Stanley, ye do not understand these creatures, and it angers me to think that ye are being cheated and imposed on right and left. Getting more boats and nets?—they'll laugh at ye, they'll just laugh at ye when ye ask them to pay up the instalments! And who is your adviser?—a young man who is in secret league with them—an underhand,

conspiring ne'er-do-weel, as cunning as any one of them, and as treacherous——"

"Mr. Purdie," she said—with a sudden change of tone he did not fail to note, "what do you mean? I—I beg you to be a little more respectful in your language."

"It's the old story," said the factor, with affected resignation. "Ye may work and work, and do the best for your employers; and then some stranger is called in, new advice is taken, and all you have done is destroyed. And I wonder if the people will be any the better off. I wonder what change in their condeetion it will make—what permanent change, when once you stop putting your hand in your pocket. Improvements? Oh, yes, yes; improvements are all very fine. But I'm thinking that spending money on free libraries and the like o' that will not help them much in getting in their crops."

"As for that," she retorted—but with no displeasure, only a little quiet confidence, "I can merely say that I am trying to do my best, in a great many different ways; and the result,

whatever it may be, is a long way off yet. And I live in hope. Of course, there is much more that I should like to do, and do at once; but I cannot; for I haven't sufficient money. I don't deny that there is a great deal still to be amended: I can't work miracles. The people are very poor—and many of them not too industrious; the soil is bad; the fishing is uncertain; and communication difficult. I dare say there is even a good deal of wretchedness—or rather, what a stranger would regard as extreme wretchedness and misery; but all that cannot be changed in a moment, even if it turns out that it can be changed at all. And at least there is little sickness; the poorest cottages have the fresh air blowing around them—they're better than the London slums, at all events. And one must just do what one can; and hope for the best."

"I tell ye, ye are going entirely the wrong way to work wi' these people, Miss Stanley," said he, as they were crossing the bridge and about to enter the village. "It's my place to tell ye. It's my bounden duty to tell ye. And I

say they are just making sport wi' ye. They are born beggars; work of any kind is an abomination to them; and you'll find they'll be like leeches—give, give always; and when you've ruined the estate on their behalf, what then?"

"I don't see any such prospect—not at present," said Mary, cheerfully.

"Who is likely to know most about them, you or me?" he went on with dogged persistence. "Who has had most experience of them? Who has had dealings with them for years and years, and learned their tricks? A whining, cringing, useless set, cunning as the very mischief, and having not even an idea of what speaking the truth is. Plausible enough—oh, ay—plausible with a stranger—especially when they expect to get anything."

"Mr. Purdie," said Mary, interrupting him, "I presume from your name you belong to the south of Scotland. Well, I have been told that the Scotch—the people in the southern half of Scotland—do not understand the Highland

character at all; and cannot understand it, for they have no sympathy with it. I have been told that the English have far more sympathy with the Highland nature. And I am English."

"Ay, and who told ye that about the Scotch and the Highlanders?" he said, suddenly and sharply.

She hesitated for a second.

"It is of little consequence," she answered him. "But I would like to add this—that denunciations of the inhabitants of a whole country-side do not seem to me of much value. I suppose human nature is pretty much the same in Lochgarra as it is elsewhere. And—and—besides, Mr. Purdie—I do not wish to hear evil spoken of a people amongst whom I have many friends."

She spoke with some dignity.

"Evil speaking?" said he, with louring eyebrows, "I for one am not given to evil speaking—or the truth might have been told you ere now."

"The truth?—what truth?" she demanded.

"The truth about one that is too much at your right hand, Miss Stanley, if I may make bold to say so." At this moment they arrived at the door of the inn; and she paused, expecting him to leave her; but he said: "No, I will go on with you as far as Lochgarra House. It is time I should open my lips at last. I have been patient. I have stood by. I have heard what has been going on—and I have held my tongue. And why?—because there are things that it is difficult to speak of to an unmarried young woman."

Mary was a trifle bewildered. They were walking along through the village, on this quiet afternoon, with nothing to interrupt the peaceful stillness save the recurrent plash of the ripples on the beach: it was hardly the time or the place to be associated with any tragic disclosure. Moreover, had she heard aright? Was it of Donald Ross he was speaking?

"And I will say this for myself," the factor continued, "that I warned ye about the character of that young man, as plainly as I dared

—ay, the very first day ye set foot in the place—— "

"You mean Mr. Ross?" said she, lightly. "Pray spare yourself the trouble, Mr. Purdie. You forget I have had some opportunities of studying Mr. Ross's character. I know him a little. What did you say?—that you had something to tell? Oh, no; don't give yourself the trouble. I know him a little."

"You do not know him at all!" he said, with a vehemence that startled her. "I tell ye there is not one in this place who would dare to tell ye the story; and would I, unless I was bound to do it? If there was a married woman at Lochgarra House, it's to her I would go; and she would tell ye; but I say it is my bounden duty to speak — and to speak plainly—— "

"Mr. Purdie, I do not wish to hear," she said, with some touch of alarm.

"But ye must hear," he said, with set lips and slow, emphatic utterance. "Ye are bound to hear—and to understand the character of the man ye are publicly associating yourself

with. A scoundrel of that kind has no right to be going about with a virtuous and respectable young woman—— "

"Mr. Purdie," she said, hurriedly, "I don't want to know—I don't believe—I wouldn't believe—— "

"Miss Stanley," he said, with measured deliberation, "ye have some knowledge of that poor half-witted creature they call Anna Chlannach. But did it never occur to ye to ask how she came to lose her reason? Ay, but if ye had asked, they would not have told ye; there's not one o' them about here but would lie through thick and thin to screen that scapegrace; and what then would be the use o' your asking? But I can tell ye; and I say it's my bounden duty to speak, if there's none else here to warn ye. And there is my witness —there is the living witness to that scoundrel's licentiousness and wicked cruelty: go to her—ask herself—ask her what makes her wander about the shore watching for him, looking out to Heimra as if the ill he has done her could now be repaired. The poor lass, betrayed,

deserted: no wonder she lost her reason—ay, and it's a good thing the currents along this coast are strong, or I'm thinking there might have been a trial for infanticide as well——"

Mary heard no more: she did not know that he was still talking to her; she did not know that he accompanied her almost to the house, where he left her. For—after the first fierce and indignant denial that involuntarily rushed to her mind—what she saw before her burning eyes was a series of visions, each of them of the most terrible distinctness, and all of them related in some ghastly way to this story she had just been told. What were these things, then, that seemed to sear her very eyeballs? She saw the little harbour of Camus Bheag; she saw the figure of a young girl rocking herself in an utter abandonment of misery and despair; she saw piteous hands held out; she heard that heart-broken wail piercing the silence as the boat made slowly away for Eilean Heimra. And then again she was on the heights above the Garra, and looking down upon the bridge.

Those two there?—she had taken them for lovers—she had called Käthchen's attention—it was a pretty scene. Then the sudden, swift disappearance of the girl into the woods; and the young man's easy, confident professions: all those things grew manifest before her with an appalling clearness; a blinding light burned upon them. Nay, her very first interview with Anna Chlannach came back to startle her: she remembered the poor demented girl wandering among the rocks, all her intelligible talk being about Heimra: she remembered her being easily persuaded to walk towards the house; she remembered, too, how Anna Chlannach fled in terror the moment she came in sight of the stranger who knew her history. What hideous tale was it that seemed to summon up these scenes, appealing to them for corroboration? What was it they seemed to say was true—true as if written up before her in letters of fire?

There was no time for her to reason or think. For here, as it chanced, was this very man—this Donald Ross—coming down the wide steps

from her own door. And all her soul was in revolt. Her wounded pride—her sense of humiliation—scorched her like flame. How had this man dared to lift his eyes to her? Unabashed he had come into the same room with her—he had breathed the same air—he had touched her hand: a contamination that was a poisoned sting. And the people of Lochgarra, who had seen him and her walking together: were they cognisant of his low amours? They had wagged their heads, perhaps? They had looked the one to the other?

"I half-expected to meet you," said Donald Ross.

There was no answer. But Mary Stanley did not lower her head, or avert her face; she was too proud for that; her heart might be beating as though it would burst its prison, but to all outward appearance she was quite unmoved. She passed him, pale and cold and silent; and he stood on one side, looking at her, without a word. She went into the house; she took no notice of Käthchen, who was still in the hall; she made for her own room, and

locked herself in there—voiceless, tearless, with all the fair fabric of her life, its aims, and dreams, and ideals, its still more secret and trembling hopes, become suddenly and at one blow a tragic desolation of wreckage and ruin.

CHAPTER VII.

"'TWAS WHEN THE SEAS WERE ROARING."

It was early morning out at Heimra; the sky comparatively clear as yet, though there was a squally look about the flying rags of cloud; the sea obviously freshening up, and already springing white along the headlands. And here at the little landing-slip were Coinneach Breac and Calum, waiting by the side of the yacht's boat, and from time to time conversing in their native tongue.

"I am not liking the look of this morning," said Coinneach, "with the glass down near half-an-inch since last night. But if the master wishes me to go, then it is I who am ready to go, and I do not care where it is that I may be going. For who knows the anchor-

ages better than himself, and the tides, and the currents, and the navigation?"

And then presently he said, in a more sombre tone:

"There is something that I do not understand. Did you look at the master when he was coming away from the mainland last evening? There has a trouble fallen on him: mark my words, Calum; for you are a young man and not quick to see such things. And do you know what Martha was telling me when I went up to the house this morning?—she was telling me that the master was not coming near the house all the night through; and it is I myself that saw him coming slowly down the hill not more than half-an-hour ago. And if he was up by the white grave all the night through, that is not a good thing for a young man. A grave without a wall round it is not a good thing."

And then again he said:

"It is I who would like to know who brought the trouble on the young master; and last night, as I was lying in my bunk, thinking over this thing and that thing, and wondering

what it was that had happened, I was remembering that the Little Red Dwarf came to Lochgarra yesterday—yes, and he the only stranger that came to Lochgarra yesterday."

"I wish the Little Red Dwarf were with his father the devil," said Calum, with calm content.

"And if I thought it was the Little Red Dwarf that was the cause of the master's trouble," said Coinneach, with his deep-set grey eyes full of a dark hatred, "do you know what I would do, Calum? I would put the *orra-an-donais* on him. That is what I would do, ay, this very night. This very night I would take two branches of hawthorn, and I would nail them as a cross, and at twelve o'clock I would put them against his door; and then I would say this: '*God's wrath to be set against thy face, whether thou art drowning at sea or burning on land; and a branch of hawthorn between thy heart and thy kidneys; and for thy soul the lowermost floor in hell, for ever and ever.*' He is a powerful man, the Little Red Dwarf, and he has wide shoulders; but how would he fare with the *orra-an-donais* on his wide shoulders?"

But Calum shook his head.

"No, no," said the long, loutish, good-humoured-looking lad, "I do not think well of such things. They are dangerous things. They are like the bending of a stick; and who knows but that the stick may fly back and strike you? But this is what I have in my mind, Coinneach: if the master wishes, then I would just take the Little Red Dwarf and I would put him in a pool in the Garra, ay, and I would hold his head down until he was as dead as a rat. Aw, *Dyeea*, there would be no trouble with the Little Red Dwarf after that!"

"The master!" said Coinneach—and there was silence.

Young Donald appeared somewhat pale and tired; but otherwise did not seem out of spirits.

"Well, Coinneach," he said, cheerfully enough, as he came up—and he spoke in the tongue that was most familiar to them—"what do you think of taking the world for your pillow—as they say in the old stories; and would you set out at this very moment?"

"But with you, sir?" said Coinneach, quickly.

"Oh, yes, yes—in the *Sirène*."

"I am willing to go wherever Mr. Ross wishes, and at any time, and for any length of time—it is Mr. Ross himself knows that," Coinneach made answer.

"And you, Calum?"

"It is the same that I am saying," responded the younger lad, with downcast eyes.

"And where would you like to go, Coinneach, if you have all the world to choose from?" the young master asked.

"That is not for me to say—that is for Mr. Ross to say."

"And if you were never to see Eilean Heimra again?"

"That also to me is indifferent," said Coinneach, with dogged obedience.

Donald Ross stepped into the boat, and took his seat in the stern.

"Come away, then, lads; for if we are to set out on our travels, we must make a hasty start. Did you look at the glass this morning, Coinneach? And there is a thick bank of cloud

rising in the west: we shall not want for wind, I'm thinking, when we get outside. And as for getting under way at a moment's notice, well, we can put in stores and everything else that is wanted when we are safe in Portree Harbour, with a little time to spare. For there is wild weather coming, Coinneach, if I am not mistaken; but anything is better than being storm-stayed at Heimra, when it is to the south you wish to be going."

And he himself helped the two men to get the vessel in readiness when they had got on board—ordering them, as a preliminary precaution, to take down a couple of reefs in the mainsail. For even here in this sheltered little bay, the omens were inauspicious; the sky had grown dark and the wind had risen; there was a low and troubled and continuous murmur from the out-jutting spur on the north.

"It is an angry-looking day to be leaving Heimra," young Ross said; "but perhaps there is no one wishing us to remain at Heimra; and you and I, Coinneach, have been companions before now. And if I am asking you to go

away in a hurry, well, there will be time to get all we want at Portree."

"And what do I want," said Coinneach, "except tobacco? And it is not even that would hinder me from going wherever Mr. Ross wishes to be going."

The young master went aft to the tiller. As the yacht slowly crept forward he turned for a moment and glanced towards the island they were leaving.

"Poor old Martha," he said to himself; "I must try to find another place for her somewhere and get her away; it would be the breaking of her heart if she were to see strangers come to take possession of Eilean Heimra."

On Eilean Heimra he bestowed this single farewell glance; but on Lochgarra none. When they got outside into the heavily-running seas he did not turn once to look at the distant bay and its strip of cottages, nor yet at the promontory where the sharp gusts of the gale were already ploughing waves along the tops of the larchwoods surrounding Lochgarra House. The

affected cheerfulness with which he had addressed the two sailors on setting forth was gone now; his face was pale and worn; the mouth stern; the eyes clouded and dark. But he had his hands full; for every moment the weather became more threatening.

"Calum," he called out, "go below and fetch me up my oil-skins. We are going to catch something pretty soon."

And so—amid this wild turmoil of driven skies and black-rolling seas—the *Sirène* bore away for the south.

And meanwhile at yonder big building among the wind-swept larches? All the long and terrible night Mary Stanley had neither slept nor thought of sleeping; she had not even undressed; she had kept walking up and down her room in a fever of agitation; or she had sate at the table, her hands clasped over her forehead, striving to shut out from her memory that dire succession of scenes, those haunting visions that seemed to have been burned into her brain. And if they would not go?—then blindly and stubbornly would she refuse to

admit that they lent any air of credibility to this tale that had been told her. Nay, she abased herself; and overwhelmed herself with reproaches; and called herself the meanest of living creatures, in that she could have believed, even for one frantic moment, that base and malignant fabrication. Why, had she not known all along of the deadly animosity that Purdie, for some reason or another, bore towards young Ross and all his family? Had she not herself discovered that previous charges against Donald Ross owned no foundation other than a rancorous and reckless spite? And she had taken the unsupported testimony of one who appeared to be out of his mind with malice and hatred against the man who was her lover, as he and she knew in their secret hearts? In one second of unreasoning impulse she had destroyed all those fair possibilities that lay within her grasp; she had ruined her life; and wounded to the quick the one that was dearest to her in all the world. And well she knew how proud and relentless he was: he had forgiven much, to her and hers; but this he would

never forgive. It was more than an insult; it was a betrayal: what would he think of her, even if she could go to him, and make humble confession, and implore his pardon? How could she explain that instant of panic following her first indignant repudiation—then the hapless chance that brought him face to face with her—then the fierce revolt of a maiden soul against contamination—alas! all in a sudden bewilderment of error, that could never be atoned for now. What must he think of her? —she kept repeating to herself—of her, faithless, shameless, who had spurned his loyal trust in her? If she went and grovelled in the very dust before him, and stretched out her hands towards him, he would turn away from her, remorseless and implacable. She was not worthy of his disdain.

And nevertheless, upbraid herself as she might, she still beheld before her aching eyes those two figures on the Garra bridge, followed by the swift disappearance of the girl into the woods; and again she saw her down at the shore, entreating to be taken out to Heimra

Island and piercing the silence with her despair when she was left behind. It was not Purdie who had shown her these things; it was of her own knowledge she knew them; they had started up before her, in corroboration of his impeachment, even as he spoke. But what if she were to accept his challenge? What if she were to go to Anna Chlannach herself? He had declared she was his witness—his living witness. If there were any foundation for this terrible story, she would confess the truth: if, as Mary Stanley strove to convince herself, the charge was nothing but a deliberate and malevolent invention, she would be able to hurl the black falsehood back in his teeth. He had challenged her to go to Anna Chlannach: to Anna Chlannach she would go.

And then (as the blue-grey light of the dawn appeared in the window-panes) a sense of her utter helplessness came over her. That poor, half-witted creature knew no word of English. And how was she to appeal to any third person, asking for intervention? How could she demean herself by repeating such a

story, and by admitting even the possibility of its being true? Nay more: might not her motives be misconstrued? What would the third person, the interpreter, think of these shamefaced inquiries? That the mistress of Lochgarra House was moved by an angry jealousy of that poor wandering waif? That Mary Stanley and Anna Chlannach were in the position of rivals? Her cheeks burned. Not in that way could she find the means of hurling back Purdie's monstrous accusation.

The white daylight broadened over land and sea; and away out yonder was Heimra Island, shining all the fairer because of the black and slow-moving wall of cloud along the western horizon. What had happened since yesterday, then? She hardly knew: she knew only that her heart lay heavy within her bosom, and that despair instead of sleep seemed to weigh down her eyelids. Was it only yesterday that she had been away up at Loch Heimra, imagining it once more a sheet of water, and pleasing herself with the fancy that some afternoon she would bring her lover along the road with her,

to show him what she had done to make meek amends? Yesterday, when she thought of him, which was often enough, joy had filled her whole being, and kindness, and gratitude, and well-wishing to the universal world. Yesterday he and she were friends; and to look forward to their next meeting was to her a secret delight which she could dwell upon, even in talking with strangers. But now—this new day: what had it brought her, that she was so numb, and cold, and hopeless? And what was this that lay so heavy in her breast?

Suddenly she sprang to her feet—her eyes staring. A boat was creeping out from the southernmost headland of Eilean Heimra. It was a small vessel with sails: it was the *Sirène*, she made sure. And was he coming ashore now—coming straight to Lochgarra House, as was his wont—coming, in open and manly fashion, to demand an explanation from her? And even if he were to upbraid her, and shower anger and scorn upon her, what then?—so long as he showed himself not wholly unfor-

giving, so long as he allowed her to speak. But as she stood at the window there, intently watching the distant ship, a shuddering suspicion seemed to paralyse her. The *Sirène* was not coming this way at all: it was slowly, gradually, unmistakably making for the south. And no sooner had this fear become a certainty than the world appeared to swim around her. There was to be no explanation, then?—not even that torrent of bitter and angry reproach? He was going away—silent, stern, inexorable? This was his answer? He would not stoop to demand explanations: he would simply withdraw? It was not fit that he should mate or match with such as she.

And at the same moment she caught sight of Big Archie, who was pulling out to his boat. In her terror, and despair, and helplessness, she did not think twice; her resolution was formed in a moment; she threw a shawl over her head and shoulders, and fled downstairs, and out into the open. Quickly she made her way along the beach.

"Archie!" she called, in the teeth of the

wind. "Archie! Archie! I want you!—come ashore, quick!"

The heavy-shouldered and heavy-bearded fisherman, who was still in the smaller boat, paused on his oars for a second; and then, probably understanding more from her gestures than from her words what she wished, he headed round and made for the beach. And before he had reached the land she had called to him again.

"Archie, that is the *Sirène*—going away from Heimra?"

"Yes, indeed, mem," said Archie.

"You must take me out in your lugger, Archie," she said, in a frenzied sort of way. "There's not a moment to be lost: even if you can't sail as quick as they can, never mind—we will get some distance after them—they will see us—we can signal to them——"

The bow of the small boat rose on the shingle and seaweed; Big Archie stepped out and pulled it up a bit further. He did not quite understand at first what was demanded of him; perhaps he was a trifle scared by the

unusual look on Miss Stanley's face—the pallid cheeks, the piteous and anxious eyes; but when he did comprehend, his answer was a serious and earnest remonstrance.

"Aw, *Dyeea*, do you not see what it is threatening out there?" said he, quite concerned.

"I do not care about that," she answered him. "If the *Sirène* can go out, so can you. And you have the sail up, Archie!"

"Ay, ay, indeed," he explained, "bekass I was thinking of going round to Ru Gobhar, to hef a look at the lobster-traps. But when I was seeing the bad weather threatening, and the glass down, then I was just going out to the boat to get the sail lowered again and the young lad brought ashore. It is just anything I would do to please Miss Stanley; but it is looking very, very bad; and we could not catch up on the *Sirène* whatever—aw, no!—it is no use to think my boat could get near to the *Sirène*, and her a first-class yat and a fine sailer. And Miss Stanley getting very wet, too, for there's a heavy sea outside——"

"Archie," she said, in an imploring voice, "if you are a friend of mine, you will try! You will try to stop the *Sirène*—cannot we make some signal to her? And you said the young lad was in the boat?—and the sail is up—we could get away at once——"

"Oh, if you wish it, mem, that is enough for me," he said; and presently he had got her into the stern of the small boat, had shoved off, and was pulling out to the big, brown-sailed lugger.

Archie had moorings in the bay, so that they lost no time in setting forth. And at first everything went well enough; for they had merely to beat out against the swirls of wind that came into the sheltered harbour; and the water was comparatively smooth. But when they got into the open they found a heavy sea running; and the lugger began to dip her bows and fling flying showers of spray down to the stern; while the bank of black cloud in the west was slowly advancing, heralded by torn shreds of silver that chased each other across the menacing sky. Big

Archie took off his jacket and offered it to Miss Stanley, to shield her from the wet; but she obstinately refused, and bade him put it on again: her sole and whole attention was fixed on the phantom-grey yacht down there in the south, that was every other moment hidden from view by the surging crests of the waves. She had to cling to the gunwale, to prevent her being hurled from her seat; for the lugger was labouring sorely, and staggering under these successive shocks; but all the same her eyes, though they smarted from the salt foam, were following the now distant *Sirène* with a kind of wild entreaty in them, as though she would fain have called across the waste of waters.

"Can they see us, Archie?—can they see us?" she cried. "Could not the boy climb up to the mast-head and wave something?"

"Aw, no, mem," said Archie, "they are too far aweh. They are far too far aweh. And they are not knowing we are looking towards them."

"But if we keep right on to Heimra?" said

she, in her desperation. "Surely they will see we are making for the island—they will come back——"

"They would just think it was the Gillie Ciotach going out to look after the lobster-traps," said Archie.

"Not in this weather!" she urged. "Not in this weather! They must see it is something of importance. They will see the boat going out to Heimra—they are sure to come back, Archie—they are certain to come back!"

"We will hold on for Heimra if you wish it, mem—but there's a bad sea getting up," said Archie, with his eye on those tumultuous swift-running masses of water, the crashing into which caused even this heavy craft to quiver from stem to stern. By this time the heavens had still further darkened around them—a boding gloom, accompanied, as it was, by a fitful howling of wind; while rain was falling in torrents. Not that this latter mattered very much, for they were all of them drenched to the skin by the seas that were leaping high from the lugger's bows; only

that the deluge thickened all the air, so that it became more and more difficult to catch a glimpse of the now fast-receding *Sirène*. Archie paid but little attention to the yacht; he seemed to have no hope of attracting her notice; but he was greatly distressed about the condition of the young mistress of Lochgarra.

"If I had known, mem—if I had known early in the moarning—I would hef brought something to cover you," said he, in accents of deep commiseration. "It is a great peety—— "

"Never mind about that, Archie," said she. "Don't you think they must know now that we are making for Heimra?"

"They are a long weh aweh," said Big Archie, shaking the salt water from his eyebrows and beard. "And they will be looking after themselves now. It was a stranche thing for Mr. Ross to put out with a storm coming on."

"Is there any danger, Archie?" she said, quickly. "Are they going into any danger?"

Archie was silent for a second.

"I am not knowing what would mek Mr. Ross start out on a moarning like this," said he. "And where he is going I cannot seh. But he is one that knows the signs of the weather—aw, yes, mem!—and it is likely he will make in for Gairloch, or Loch Torridon, or mebbe he will get as far down as the back of Rona Island——"

"No, no, Archie, he must see us—he cannot help seeing us!" she exclaimed. "When we are getting close to Heinra, then he cannot help seeing us—he will understand—and surely he will come back!"

And meanwhile the gale had been increasing in fury: the wind moaning low and whistling shrill alternately, the high-springing spray rattling down on the boat with a noise as of gravel. The old lugger groaned and strained and creaked—burying herself—shaking herself—reeling before the ponderous blows of the surge; but Archie gave it her well; there was no timorous shivering up into the wind. His two hands gripped the sheet—the tiller under his arm; his feet were wedged firm against

the stone ballast; his mouth set hard; his eyes clear enough in spite of the driving rain and whirling foam. And now this island of Heimra was drawing nearer—if the *Sirène* far away in the south had almost vanished.

"Look now, Archie!—look now, for I can see nothing," she said, piteously.

He raised himself somewhat; and scanned the southern horizon, as well as the heaving and breaking billows would allow.

"Aw, no, mem, the *Sirène* is not in sight at ahl—not in sight at ahl now," he said.

She uttered a stifled little cry, as of despair.

"Archie," she said, "could you not follow down to Loch Torridon?"

"Aw, God bless us, mem, the boat would not live long in a sea like this—it is getting worse and worse every meenit——"

"Very well," said she, wearily, "very well. You have done what you could, Archie: now there is nothing but to get away back home again."

But that was not at all Big Archie's intention.

"Indeed no, mem," said he, with decision, "I am not going aweh back to Lochgarra, and you in such a state, mem, when there is a good shelter close by, ay, and a house. It is into Heimra Bay that I am going; and there is the house; and Martha will hef your clothes dried for you, mem, and give you warm food and such things. And mebbe the gale will quiet down a little in the afternoon, or mebbe to-morrow it will quiet down, and we will get back to Lochgarra; but it is not weather for an open boat at ahl."

She made no answer. She did not seem to care. She sate there with eyes fixed and haggard: perhaps it was not the cliffs of Heimra she saw before her, but the wild headlands of Wester Ross, and a lurid and thundering sea, and a small phantom-grey yacht flying for shelter. She appeared to take no notice as they rounded the stormy point with its furious, boiling surge, and as they gradually left behind them that roaring waste of waves, escaping into the friendly quietude of the land-locked little bay. She was quite passive in Archie's hands

—getting into the small boat listlessly when the lugger had been brought to anchor; and when she stepped ashore she set out to walk up to the house, he respectfully following. But she had miscalculated her strength. For one thing, she had not tasted food since the middle of the previous day; nor had she once closed her eyes during the night. Then she was dazed with the wind and the rain; her clothes clung to her and chilled her to the bone; the feverish anxiety of the morning had left her nerves all unstrung. Indeed, she could not drag herself up the beach. She went a few steps—hesitated—turned round as if seeking for help in a piteous sort of way—then she sank on to the rocks, and abandoned herself to a passion of grief and despair, from sheer weakness.

"I cannot go up to the house, Archie," she said, in a half-hysterical fashion, amid her choking sobs, "and—and why should I go—to an empty house? It—it is empty—you—you let the *Sirène* sail away—but—but never mind that—it is all my fault—more than you know.

And I want you to leave me here, Archie—go away back to Lochgarra—there is no one cares what becomes of me—what does it matter to anyone? I do nothing but harm—nothing but harm—there is no need to care what becomes of me——"

The huge, lumbering, good-hearted fisherman was in a sad plight: he knew not in the least what to do; he stood there irresolute, the deepest concern and sympathy in his eyes, himself unable or not daring to utter a word. But help was at hand. For here was Martha, hurrying along as fast as her aged limbs would allow, and bringing with her a great fur rug.

"Dear, dear me!" she exclaimed, as she came up. "What could mek Miss Stanley venture out o' the house on a day like this?"

And therewith she put the rug round the girl's shoulders, and got her to her feet, and, with many encouragements and consolatory phrases, assisted her on her way up from the shore.

"I will get a nice warm bed ready for you at once, mem," said the old dame, "with plenty

of blankets; and I will bring you something hot and comfortable for you, for you hef got ferry, ferry wet. Dear, dear me!—but we'll soon hef you made all right; for Mr. Ross would be an angry man, ay, indeed, if he was hearing that Miss Stanley had come to Heimra, and not everything done for her that could be done."

But when, after struggling through the blinding rain, they reached the porch, and when Martha had opened the front-door, Miss Stanley did not go further than the hall: she sank exhausted into the solitary chair there.

"Martha," she said, "do not trouble about me. I want to ask you a question. Did Mr. Ross say where he was going when he left in the *Sirène* this morning?"

"No, mem—not a word," Martha answered her, "about where he was going, or when he was coming back. It was a strange way of leaving—and in the face of such weather; but young people they hef odd fancies come in their head. Think of this, mem, that he never was near the house last night; he was aweh up the

hill; and I'm feared that he was saying good-bye to his mother's grave, and that it will be long ere we see him back in Heimra again. For he is a strange young man—and not like others. But you'll come aweh now, mem, and get off your wet things: it is Mr. Ross himself would be terrible angry if you were not well cared for in this house."

The day without was sombre and dark; and the light entering here was wan: perhaps that was the cause of the singular alteration in Mary Stanley's appearance. She—who had hitherto been always and ever the very embodiment of buoyant youth, and health, and high spirits—now looked old. And her eyes were as if night had fallen upon them.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MISSION.

All that day the gale did not abate in fury; nor yet on the next; and even on the third day Gilleasbuig Mòr still hesitated about trying to get back to Lochgarra, for the sea was running high, and the wind blew in angry gusts and squalls. But on the morning of this third day communication with the mainland was resumed; for shortly after eleven o'clock a lug-sail boat made its appearance, coming round the point into the little bay; and at a glance Archie knew who this must be—this could be no other than that venturesome dare-devil the Gillie Ciotach, who had doubtless been sent out by Miss Glendinning to gain tidings of her friend. Big Archie went down to the slip, to await the boat's arrival.

And when the Gillie Ciotach, whose sole companion was a little, old, white-headed man called Dugald MacIsaac, came ashore he was in a triumphant mood over his exploit, and had nothing but taunts and jeers for the storm-stayed Archie.

"Aw, God," said he (in Gaelic) as he fetched out the parcels that had come by the mail for Martha, "there is nothing makes me laugh so much as a Tarbert man when there is a little breeze of wind anywhere. A Tarbert man will hide behind a barn-door; and if a rat squeaks, his heart is in his mouth. For what is Loch Fyne? Loch Fyne is only a ditch. A Tarbert man does not learn anything of the sea; he runs away behind a door if there is a puff of wind blowing anywhere. And have you taken possession of Heimra, Archie? Are you going to stay here for ever? Are you never going back to Loch-garra?"

"Andrew," said Big Archie, quite good-naturedly, "you are a clever lad; but maybe you do not know what the wise man of Mull

said: he said, '*The proper time is better than too soon.*'"

"Too soon? And is it too soon, then, for me to come over?" said the young man of the slashed forehead and the bold eye.

"You!" said Big Archie. "But who is mindful of you or what becomes of you? When I go over to Lochgarra, it is a valuable cargo I will have with me. That is what makes me mindful. You?—who cares whether you and your packages of tea go to the bottom?"

But the Gillie Ciotach was so elate over this achievement of his that, instead of bandying further words, he stood up to Big Archie, and began to spar, dancing from side to side, and aiming cuffs at him with his open hand. The huge, good-humoured giant bore this for a while, merely trying to ward off these playful blows; but at last—the Gillie Ciotach unwarily offering an opportunity — Archie suddenly seized him by the breeches and the scruff of the neck, and by a tremendous effort of strength heaved him off the slip altogether—heaved him into a bed of seaweed and sand.

The Gillie Ciotach picked himself up slowly, and slowly and deliberately he took off his jacket. His brows were frowning.

"We will just settle this thing now, Archie," said he, stepping up on to the slip again. "We will see who is the better man, you or I. You can catch a quick grip—oh, yes, and you have strength in your arms; but maybe in an honest fight you will not do so well——"

"Oh, be peaceable!—be peaceable!" said Big Archie. "If you want fighting, go and seek out some of the Minard lads—though that would be carrying timber to Lochaber, as the saying is."

"Andrew, my son," said the little old man in the boat, "there is the Baintighearna come to the door."

The Gillie Ciotach glanced towards the porch of the cottage; and there, sure enough, was Miss Stanley—and also Martha.

"It is the luck of Friday that is on me," he said, with a laugh; "for I am the one that was to stop all the fighting! Well, come away up to the house, Archie; you are a friendly

man; and if she asks why I was taking off my jacket, you will swear to her that I was only searching for my pipe. For a lie is good enough for women at any time."

They got up to the house, and the Gillie Ciotach delivered his parcels, and the newspapers, and one or two letters, and said that Miss Glendinning had sent him over to take back assurances of their safety.

"But I was telling the lady there was no chance of harm," said he; "for we saw Miss Stanley go on board, and we saw Archie's lugger standing in for Heimra, and every one knew there would be good shelter from the storm——"

"And the *Sirène*, Andrew—have you heard anything of the *Sirène?*" Mary asked quickly —and her eyes were alert and anxious, if the rest of her features looked tired and worn.

"Aw, the *Sirène*, mem?" said the Gillie Ciotach, confidently. "I am sure the *Sirène* is just as safe as any of us. There's no harm coming to the *Sirène*, mem, as long as Mr. Ross himself is on board. It's the God's truth I'm telling ye, mem. Mr. Ross he would put

in to Loch Broom or Loch Ewe; and he knows every anchorage to half a fathom; and, with plenty of chain out, and an anchor-watch, where would the harm be coming to him?"

"You have no doubt of it, Andrew?"

"It's as sure as death, mem!" said the Gillie Ciotach, with an almost angry vehemence.

She seemed a little relieved.

"And the sea outside, Andrew—is it very bad?"

"It's a bit wild," he admitted; and then he added, with a cool audacity: "but mebbe Miss Stanley would be for going back with me now, if Archie is too afraid to go out?"

"Oh, no, thank you," said she. "If Archie does not think it safe, I should not think of venturing. I will wait for him—thank you all the same."

Here there was an awkward pause. Mary left the little group, walking over to the edge of the plateau, to get a better view of the distant and troubled line of the sea. The Gillie Ciotach stood twirling his Glengarry bonnet. Then he said timidly to Martha—

"Are there any empty casks going back?"

"None but yourself, Andrew, my lad," said Martha, with a dark smile in her eyes.

At this he plucked up spirit.

"There's a way of curing that, as you know, Martha," said he. "And it's many's the time I have come out to Heimra, and I never before had to complain of going away like an empty cask."

"And you need not complain of it now, Andrew, my son," said Martha. "Come away round to the kitchen, and I will get you something—ay, and you will take something down to old Dugald, too. For although the master of the house is not in his own home, I know his wish; and it is I who would get the blame if any one went away hungry or cold from Eilean Heimra."

But it was not until the afternoon that Big Archie considered it prudent to cross to the mainland; and a rough passage they had of it. Mary, however, was on this occasion provided with an abundance of wraps; and was indifferent to wind, and spray, and rain. Pos-

sibly there may have been other reasons for her apathy.

Kate Glendinning was down at the slip beside the quay.

"Mamie," she exclaimed, when her friend landed, "what took you out to Heimra on that wild morning? I could not believe it when I was told. And I sent over to know you were safe as soon as I could get any one to go. What is the meaning of it all? If you had seen the people watching the boat!—they did not know what might happen."

"I cannot explain; and you must not ask, Käthchen, now or at any time," was her answer. "But tell me, has the gale done much damage? The harvest was looking so well in those little patches——"

"Damage?" said Käthchen. "It isn't damage, Mamie; it is destruction—devastation —everywhere. Oh, it is pitiable. The corn beaten down—the crofts flooded—well, well, the only thing to be said is that the poor people are not so disheartened as you might expect. Perhaps they are used to such bitter dis-

appointments. I do believe this place is fit only for sheep—and hardly fit for them."

"What can I do, Käthchen," said Mary, with a curious listlessness, "beyond lowering their rent again? I suppose that is all I can do. They would not go to Manitoba with me: would they, Käthchen? Do you think they would? Would you, now?"

"Manitoba?" repeated Käthchen, looking at her. "What has happened, Mamie? I don't understand the way you speak. Why should you talk about Manitoba, when you were so set against it?"

"The climate appears to be so uncertain here," she said, rather wearily, as they were ascending the steps of Lochgarra House; "and—and the people have of late been more friendly towards me; and I would like to do what I could for them. There is nothing to keep me in this country. I would go away willingly with them—to Canada, or anywhere. But perhaps not you, Käthchen. I could not expect you. All your interests are in this country—or in England, at least. But if I were to sell Lochgarra, I

could get money to take them all away to Canada, and buy good land for them, and see them comfortably established; and then I should have done my duty by them, as I intended to do when I came here at first. And—and I don't think I should care to come back."

She furtively wiped away the tears from her lashes: Käthchen did not notice. They were passing through the hall now.

"I cannot understand what you mean, Mamie. What is it? What has happened? Did you see Mr. Ross when you were at Heimra? I heard that the *Sirène* had left the morning you went out—and I took it for granted that Mr. Ross had gone with her——"

"Käthchen, to please me," she said, beseechingly, "will you never mention Heimra again? Mr. Ross is away—and—and I have been to the island for the last time; that is all."

When they went into the room, she threw herself down on a couch, and put her clasped hands on the arm of it, and hid her face. She was not crying; she merely seemed overcome with fatigue and lassitude. Kate Glendinning

knelt down beside her, and with gentle fingers caressingly stroked and smoothed the beautiful golden-brown hair that had been all dishevelled by the wind.

"What is it, Mamie?"

"Tell me about the farms, Käthchen," was the answer, uttered in a hopeless kind of way. "I don't know anything about farm work, except what I have been told since I came here. Are the crops so completely destroyed? Would not fine weather give them another chance? Surely entire ruin cannot have been caused by one gale—gales are frequent on this coast——"

"This one came at a bad time, Mamie," said her companion; "and a great part of the corn will have to be cut and given to the cows. But why should you distress yourself unnecessarily? It was none of your fault. You have done everything for these poor people that could be devised. And, as I tell you, they seem used to misfortunes of this kind; there is no bewailing; their despondency has become a sort of habit with them——"

"Send for Mr. Purdie: I wish to see him"

—this was what came from those closed hands. But the next moment she had thrown herself upright. "No!" she said, fiercely. "No, I will not see Mr. Purdie. With my consent, Mr. Purdie shall never enter this house again."

"Mr. Purdie left on the very day you went out to Heimra," said Käthchen, gently; and then she went on: "You are hiding something from me, Mamie. Well, I will not ask any further. I will wait. But I am afraid you are very much fatigued, and upset, and I can see you are not well. Now will you be persuaded, Mamie! If you will only go to bed you will have a far more thorough rest; and I will bring you something that will make you sleep. Why, your forehead is burning hot, and your hands quite cold!—and if you were to get seriously ill, that would be a good deal worse for the crofters than the flattening down of their corn!"

She was amenable enough; she consented to be led away; she was ready to do anything asked of her—except to touch food or drink.

And yet the next morning she was up and out of the house before anyone was awake, and

she was making away for the solitude of the hills. She wished to be alone—and to look at the wide sea. She walked slowly, but yet her sick heart was resolute; the arduous toil of getting up the lower slopes and corries, filled with bracken, and rocks, and heather, did not hinder her; she turned from time to time to look, absently enough, at the ever-broadening plain of the Atlantic, rising up to the pale greenish-turquoise of the sky. And in time she had got over this rough ground, and had reached the lofty and sterile plateaus of peat-bog and grass, where, if it was loneliness she sought, she found it. No sign of life: no sound, except the plaintive call of a greenshank from a melancholy tarn: no movement, save that of the silver-grey masses of cloud that came over from the west. But away out yonder was the deserted island of Heimra; and far in the south were the long black promontories—Ru-Minard, Ru-Gobhar, and the rest—behind which a boat would disappear when it left for other lands. And had she heard of the *Fhir-a-Bhàta?* Did Kate Glendinning know of the song that is the most

familiar, the greatest favourite of all the West Highland songs; and had she told her friend of the maiden who used to go up the cliffs, day by day, to watch for the coming of her lover?—

'I climb the mountain and scan the ocean,
For thee, my boatman, with fond devotion:
When shall I see thee?—to-day?—to-morrow?
Oh, do not leave me in lonely sorrow!

Broken-hearted I droop and languish,
And frequent tears show my bosom's anguish:
Shall I expect thee to-night to cheer me?
Or close the door, sighing and weary.'

This, at least, Kate Glendinning soon began to learn—that nearly every morning now Mary left the house, entirely by herself, and was away by herself, in these desolate altitudes. It was clear she wished for no companionship; and Käthchen did not offer her services. Nor was any reference made to these solitary expeditions. The rest of the day Mary devoted herself to her usual work—increased, at this time, by her investigations into the extent of the injury done by the gale: as to the rest there was silence.

And thus it was that Käthchen remained

ignorant of this curious fact—that day by day these excursions were gradually being shortened. Day by day Mary Stanley found that her strength would not carry her quite so far: she had to be content with a lesser height. And at last she had altogether to abandon that laborious task of breasting the hill; she merely, and wearily enough, walked away up the Minard road—whence you can see a portion of the southern and western horizon; and there she would sit down on the heather or a boulder of rock—with a strange look in her eyes.

"Mamie!" said Käthchen, one evening—and there was grief in her voice. "Won't you tell me what has happened! I cannot bear to see you like that! You are ill. I tell you, you are seriously ill; and yet you will not say a word. And there is no one here but myself; I am in charge of you; I am responsible for you; and how can I bear to see you killing yourself before my eyes?"

Mary was lying on the couch, her face averted from the light.

"You are right in one way, Käthchen," she

said, rather sadly. "Something has happened. But no good would come of speaking about it; because it cannot be undone now. And as for being ill, I know what will make me well. It is only sleep I want. It is the sleep that knows no waking that I wish for."

Käthchen burst out crying, and flung herself down on her knees, and put her arms round her friend.

"Mamie, I declare to you I will not rest until you tell me what this is!" she exclaimed passionately.

Nor did she. And that very evening, after an unheard-of pleading and coaxing on the one side and despairing protest on the other, all those recent occurrences were confided to the faithful Käthchen. She was a little bewildered at first; but she had a nimble brain.

"Mamie," she said, with a firm air, "I don't know what doubts, or if any, may still be lingering in your mind; but I am absolutely convinced that that story of Purdie's is a lie—a wicked and abominable lie. And I can guess what drove him to it: it was a bold stroke, and it was

nearly proving successful; but it shall not prove successful. I will make it my business to get Donald Ross back to Lochgarra—and then we shall have an explanation."

"Do you think he will come back to Lochgarra? Then you do not know him," Mary made answer, and almost listlessly. "Do you imagine I have not considered everything, night after night, ay, and every hour of the night all the way through? He will never come back to Lochgarra—if it is to speak to me that you mean. I have told you before: it seems a fatality that he and his should receive nothing but injury and insult at our hands, from one member of our family after another; and never has there been a word in reply—never a single syllable of reproach—but only kindnesses innumerable, and thoughtfulness, and respect. Well, there is an end of respect now. How can he have anything but scorn of me? If I were to confess to him that I had believed that story—even for one frightened moment—what could he think of me? Why, what he thinks of me now—as a base creature, ignoble, ungrateful,

unworthy—oh! do you imagine I cannot read what is in that man's heart at this moment?"

"Do you imagine I cannot?" said Käthchen, boldly. "I have not been blind all these months. What is in that man's heart, Mamie, is a passionate love and devotion towards you; and there is no injury, and no insult, he would not forgive you if he thought that you—that you—well, that you cared for him a little. Oh, I know both you and him. I know that you are wilful and impulsive; and I know that he is proud, and sensitive, and reserved; but I think—I think—well, Mamie, no more words; but I am going to have my own way in this matter, and you must let me do precisely what I please."

And that was all she would say meanwhile. But next day was a busy day for Kate Glendinning. First of all she went straight to the Minister and demanded point-blank whether there were, or could be, any foundation for that story about Anna Chlannach; and the Minister—not directly, of course, but with many lamentations, in his high falsetto, over the wickedness of the human mind in harbouring and uttering

slanders and calumnies—answered that he had known Anna Chlannach all her life, and that she had been half-witted from her infancy, and that the tale now told him was an entire and deplorable fabrication. Indeed, he would have liked to enlarge on the theme, but Kate was in a hurry. For she had heard in passing through the village that the Gillie Ciotach was about to go over to Heimra, with the parcels and letters that had come by the previous day's mail; and it occurred to her that here was a happy chance for herself.

"Now, Andrew," she said, when she was seated comfortably in the stern of the lugger, "keep everything smooth for me. I haven't once been sea-sick since I came to Lochgarra, and I don't want to begin now."

"Aw, is it the sea-seeckness?" said the Gillie Ciotach. "Well, mem, when you feel the seeckness coming on, just you tell me, and I will give you something to mek you all right. Ay, I will give you a good strong glass of whiskey; and in a moment it will make the seeckness jump out of your body."

"Whiskey?" said Käthchen. "Do you mean to say you take a bottle of whiskey with you every time you put out in a boat?"

"Aw, as for that," said the Gillie Ciotach—and he was clearly casting about for some portentous lie or another—"I was saying to Peter Grant that mebbe the young leddy might have the sea-seeckness; and Peter he was saying to me, 'Tek a smahl bottle of whiskey with you, Andrew, and then she will hef no fear of the sea-seeckness.' And it was just for yourself, mem, I was bringing the whiskey."

"And a pretty character you seem to have given me at the inn!" said Käthchen, as she contentedly wrapped herself up in her rugs.

Martha had seen the boat on its way into the harbour; she had come out to the door of the cottage; a visitor was welcome in this solitary island.

"Martha," she said, as soon as she had got within, "have you heard any news of late?—can you tell me where the *Sirène* is now?"

"Yes, indeed, mem," said the old Highland

dame, with wondering eyes. "But do you not know that the *Sirène* is at the bottom of the sea? Was the master not writing to Miss Stanley about it?"

"We have not heard a word," Käthchen exclaimed.

"Dear, dear me now!" said Martha. "That is a stranche thing."

"But tell me—tell me about it," said Käthchen anxiously. "There was no one drowned?"

"No, no," said Martha, with much complacency. "There was plenty of time for them to get into the boat. And the master not writing to Miss Stanley at the same time he was writing to me—that is a stranche thing. But this was the weh of it, as he says; that it was an ahfu' dark night, the night of the first day of the gale; and they were mekkin for shelter between Scalpa and Skye, and they had got through the Caol-Mòr, and were coming near to an anchorage, when they ran into a trading schooner that was lying there without a single light up. Without a single light, and the night fearful dark: I'm sure the men should

be hanged that would do such a thing, to save a little oil."

"And where is Mr. Ross now?" asked Käthchen.

"Just in Greenock. He says he will try to get a place for Coinneach and for Calum, and will not trouble with a yat any more for the present. Ay, indeed," Martha went on, with a bit of a sigh, "and I'm thinking he will not be coming back soon to Heimra, when he says he will not trouble with a yat, and when he could have a yat easy enough with the insurance money——"

"Is he at a hotel in Greenock?"

"Ay, the Tontine Hotel," the old woman said. "And I am not liking what he says—that he is waiting for a friend, and they are going away from Greenock together. I am not liking that at ahl. There's many a one sailed away from the Tail of the Bank that never came back again. And he says, if it is too lonely here for me and the young lass Maggie, we are to go over to Lochgarra and get lodgings; but how could I be leaving the

house to the rain and the damp? Ay, lonely it is, except when Gillie Ciotach comes out to look after the lobster traps——"

"Well, Martha," said her visitor, "this time the Gillie Ciotach is going straight back again; for I'm rather in a hurry. And don't you move over to the mainland until you hear further. I will come and see you sometimes if you are so lonely." And therewithal the industrious Kate hied her back to the lobster boat, and set out for Lochgarra again.

Mary was lying on a sofa, her head half hidden by the cushion. She had been attempting to read; but her arm had fallen supinely by her side, and the book was half closed.

"Mamie," said Kate Glendinning, entering the room noiselessly, and approaching the sofa, "I have a favour to beg of you; but please to remember this: that I have waited on you—and worried you—all this long time; and I have never asked you for an hour's holiday. Now I am going to ask you for two or three days; and if you give me permission I mean to be off by the mail car to-morrow morning. May I go?"

The pale cheek flushed—and the fingers that held the book trembled a little. But she affected not to understand.

"Do as you wish, Käthchen," said she, in a low voice.

Well, this was an onerous, and difficult, and delicate task that Kate had undertaken; but she had plenty of courage. And her setting-forth was auspicious: when the mail-car started away from Lochgarra the dawn was giving every promise of a pleasant and cheerful day for the long drive. It is true that as they passed the Cruagan crofts her face fell a little on noticing here and there traces of the devastation that had been wrought by the gale; but she had heard that things were mending a little in consequence of the continued fine weather; and she was greatly cheered to hear the driver maintain that the people about this neighbourhood had little cause to grumble; matters had been made very easy for them, he declared, since Miss Stanley came to Lochgarra. And so on they drove, hour after hour, by Ledmore, and Oykel Bridge, and Invercassley, and Rose-

hall, until the afternoon saw her safely arrived at Lairg. Then the more tedious railway journey—away down to Inverness; on through the night to Perth; breakfast there, and on again to Glasgow; from Glasgow down to Greenock. It was about noon, or something thereafter, that she entered the dismal and rainy town.

Fortune favoured her. The Tontine Hotel is almost opposite the railway station, so that she had no difficulty in finding it; and hardly had she got within the doorway when she met Donald Ross himself crossing the hall, and apparently on his way into the street. When he made out who this was (her face was in shadow, and he did not at first recognise her) his eyes looked startled, and he threw an involuntary glance towards the door to see if there was any one accompanying her. But the girl was alone.

"Mr. Ross," said Käthchen, rather nervously —for she had not expected to encounter him just at once—"I wish to speak with you——"

"Oh, come in here, then," said he, with a

certain coldness of manner, as if he were about to face an unpleasant ordeal that was also useless; and he led the way into the coffee-room, where, at this time of the day, there was no one, not even a waiter.

Nervous Käthchen distinctly was; for she knew the terrible responsibility that lay on her; and all the fine calmness she had been calculating on in her communings with herself in lonely railway-carriages seemed now to have fled. But perhaps it was just as well; for in a somewhat incoherent, but earnest, fashion, she plunged right into the middle of things, and told him the whole story—told him of the factor's circumstantial and malignant slander, of Mary's momentary bewilderment, of the luckless meeting, and of her subsequent bitter remorse and despair. At one portion of this narrative his face grew dark, and the black eyes burned with a sullen fire.

"I have a long account to settle with Purdie," said he, as if to himself, "and it is about time the reckoning was come."

But when she had quite finished with her

eager explanations, and excuses, and indirect appeals, what was his reply? Why, not one word. She looked at him—in blank dismay.

"But, Mr. Ross!—Mr. Ross!——" she said, piteously.

There was no response: he had received her communication—that was all.

"I have told you everything: surely you understand: what—what message am I to take?" Käthchen exclaimed, in trembling appeal.

"I have heard what you had to say," he answered her, with a studied reserve that seemed to Käthchen's anxious soul nothing less than brutal, "and of course I am sorry if there has been any misunderstanding, or any suffering, anywhere. But these things are past. And as for the present, I do not gather that you have been commissioned by Miss Stanley to bring one solitary word to me—one expression of any kind whatsoever. Why should I return any reply?—she has not spoken one word."

"Oh, you ask too much!" Käthchen exclaimed, in hot indignation. "You ask too

much! Do you think Mary Stanley would send for you? She is as proud as yourself—every bit as proud! And she is a woman. You are a man: it is your place to have the courage of yielding—to have the courage of offering forgiveness, even before it is asked. If I were a man, and if I loved a woman that I thought loved me, I would not stand too much on my dignity, even if she did not speak. And what do you want—that she should say she is sorry? Mr. Ross, she is ill! I tell you, she is ill. Come and judge for yourself what all this has done to her!—you will see only too clearly whether she has been sorry or not. And that superstition of hers, about there being a fatality attending her family—that they cannot help inflicting injury and insult on you and yours — who can remove that but yourself? No," she said, a little stiffly, "I have no message from Mary Stanley to you; and if I had, I would not deliver it. And now it is for you to say or do what you think best."

"Yes, yes; yes, yes," he said, after a moment's deliberation. "I was thinking too

much of the Little Red Dwarf; I was thinking too much of that side of it. I will go back to Lochgarra, and at once. And this is Thursday; the steamer will be coming down from Glasgow to-day; that will be the easiest way for us to go back."

There was a flash of joy and triumph—and of gratitude—in Käthchen's sufficiently pretty eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BANABHARD.

The big steamer was slowly and cautiously making in for Lochgarra Bay—slowly and cautiously, for though the harbour is an excellent one after you are in it, the entrance is somewhat difficult of navigation; and Donald Ross and Kate Glendinning were seated in the after part of the boat, passing the time in talking. And of course it was mostly of Miss Stanley they spoke.

"For one thing, you ought to remember," said Käthchen, "the amount of prejudice against you she has had to overcome. If you only knew the character she received of you the very first evening we arrived here! I wonder if you would recognise the picture—a terrible outlaw living in a lonely island, a

drunken, thieving, poaching ne'er-do-well, a malignant conspirator and mischief-maker: Mr. Purdie laid on the colours pretty thickly. By the way, I wish you would tell me the cause of that bitter animosity Mr. Purdie shows against you and all your family——"

"It is simple enough—but it is not worth speaking about," he said, with a certain indifference. It was not of Purdie, nor of Purdie's doings, that he was thinking at the moment.

"But I want to know—I am curious to know," Käthchen insisted.

"It is simple enough, then," he repeated. "When the old factor died—old MacInnes—I hardly remember him, but I fancy he was a decent sort of man—when he died, my father appointed this Purdie, on the recommendation of a friend, and without knowing much about him. Well, Purdie never did get on at all with the people about here. He was an ill-tempered, ill-conditioned brute, to begin with; spiteful, revengeful, and merciless; and of course the people hated him, and of course he

came to know it, and had it out with them whenever he got the chance. You see, my father was almost constantly abroad, and Purdie had complete control. My mother tried to interfere a little; and he resented her interference; I think it made him all the more savage. And at last the discontent of the people broke out in open revolt. Purdie happened to have come over to Lochgarra; and when they heard of it, the whole lot of them—from Minard, and Cruagan, and everywhere—came together in front of the inn, and there was no end of howling and hooting. Purdie escaped through the back-garden, and took refuge with the Minister; but the crowd followed him to the Minister's cottage, and burnt his effigy in front of the door—oh, I don't know what they didn't do. Only, it got into the papers; it was a public scandal; and my father, coming to hear of it, at once deposed the twopenny-halfpenny tyrant. That is all the story. But no doubt his being ignominiously dismissed was a sore thing for a man of his nature—the public humiliation, and all the rest of it——"

"But how did he get back to his former position?" Käthchen demanded.

"Miss Stanley's uncle put him back when he bought the estate," Donald Ross said, quietly. "I fancy he had an idea that Purdie was the right kind of man for this place, especially as he himself had to be absent a good deal. Yes, I will say this for Purdie—he is an excellent man of business; he will squeeze out for you every penny of rent that is to be got at; and he has no sort of hesitation about calling in the aid of the sheriff. And of course he came back more malevolent than ever; he knew they had rejoiced over his downfall; and he was determined to make them smart for it. As for his honouring me with his hatred, that is quite natural, I suppose. It was my father who sent him into disgrace; and then—then the people about here and I are rather friendly, you know; and they had a great regard for my mother; and all that taken together is enough for Purdie. We were in league with his enemies; and they with us."

"I can imagine what he thought," said

Käthchen, meditatively, "when he saw the new proprietress taking you into her counsels, and adopting a new system, and interfering with him, and overriding his decisions at every turn. He made a bold stroke to sever that alliance between her and you; but it failed; and now he is sorry—very sorry—exceedingly sorry, I should think."

"What do you mean?" he asked, fixing his eyes upon her.

"Perhaps I should leave Mary herself to tell you," she answered him. "But that is of little consequence; it cannot be a secret. Very well: she has ordered Mr. Purdie to prepare a statement of his accounts; and his factorship ceases at Michaelmas. It was the last thing she told me before I left Lochgarra."

Donald Ross laughed.

"I had intended to have a word with Purdie," said he, "but it seems the Baintighearna has been before me."

The arrival of the steamer is always a great event at Lochgarra; there were several well-known faces on the quay. Here were the Gillie

Ciotach, and Big Archie, and the Minister, and Peter Grant, the innkeeper; and here also was Anna Clannach. The poor lass was in sad distress; she was crying and wringing her hands.

"What is the matter, Anna?" said Donald Ross, in Gaelic, as he stepped from the gangway on to the pier.

"I am wishing to go out to Heimra," said the Irish-looking girl with the dishevelled hair and streaming eyes.

"Why so?" he asked.

"It is to find my mother," she made answer, with many sobs. "When I was sleeping my mother came to me, and said I was to come out to Heimra for her, and bring her back, but when I offer the money to the men they laugh at me——"

"Anna," said he, gently, "you must not think of going out to Heimra. If you were not to find your mother there, that would be great sorrow for you. If she is coming for you, you must wait patiently——"

"But I am going out in the steamer?" said the girl, beginning to cry afresh.

"The steamer?" he said. "The steamer does not call at Heimra, not at any time."

"But it is Mr. Ross has the mastery,"* she pleaded. "It is every one that must obey Mr. Ross; and the steamer will take me out to Heimra if he tells the captain."

"Now, Anna," he said, trying to reason with her, "listen to what I am telling you. How can a great boat like that go into the small harbour of Eilean Heimra? And I have no authority over the captain, nor has any one: it is to Stornoway he is going now, and to no other place. So you must wait patiently; and I think you should go and live with the Widow MacVean, and help to do little things about the croft. For it is not good for a young lass to be without an occupation."

Anna Chlannach turned away weeping silently, and refusing to be comforted; while young Ross was immediately tackled by the Minister, who had a long tale to tell about some Presbytery case in Edinburgh.

What now occurred it is difficult to describe

* *Tighearnas*—lordship, or dominion.

consecutively, for so many things seemed to happen at once, or within the space of a few breathless seconds. The captain had discharged his cargo (Kate Glendinning and Donald Ross, with their bodyguard of Coinneach and Calum, were the only passengers), and was getting under weigh again; and to do this the more easily he had signalled down to have the engines reversed, while keeping the stern hawser on its stanchion on the pier, so that the bow of the boat should gradually slew round. It was to the man who was in charge of this massive rope that Anna Chlannach, seeing the steamer was beginning to move, addressed her final and frantic appeal—nay, she even seized him by the arm, and implored him, with loud lamentations, to let her go on the boat. The man, intently watching the captain on the bridge, tried to shake her off; grew more and more impatient of her importunity; at last he said savagely—

"To the devil with you and your mother!—I tell you your mother is dead and buried these three years!"

At this Anna Chlannach uttered a piercing shriek—she seemed to reel under the blow, in a wild horror—then, with her hands raised high above her head, she rushed to the end of the quay, and threw herself over, right under the stern-post of the steamer. Donald Ross, startled by that despairing cry, wheeled round just in time to see her disappear; and in a moment he was after her, heedless of the fact that the steamer was still backing, the powerful screw churning up the green water into seething and hissing whirlpools. But the captain had seen this swift thing happen; instantly he recognised the terrible danger; he rapped down to the engine room "Full speed ahead!"—while the man in charge of the hawser, who had *not* seen, taking this for a sufficient signal, slipped the noose off the post, and let the ponderous cable drop into the sea.

"The raven's death to you, what have you done!" Archie MacNichol cried, as he ran quickly to the edge of the quay, and stared over, his eyes aghast, his lips ashen-grey.

There was nothing visible but the seething

and foaming water, with its million million bells of air showing white in the pellucid green. Had the girl been struck down by the revolving screw? Had Donald Ross been knocked senseless by a blow from the heavy cable? Big Archie pulled off his jacket and flung it aside. He clambered over the edge of the quay, and let himself down until he stood on one of the beams below. His eyes—a fisherman's eyes—were searching those green deeps, that every moment showed more and more clear.

All this was the work of a second, and so was Archie's quick plunge into the sea when he beheld a dark object rise to the surface, some half-dozen yards away from him—the tangled black hair and the wan face belonging to a quite listless if not lifeless form. It needed but a few powerful strokes to take him along—then one arm was placed under the apparently inanimate body—while with the other he began to fight his way back again to the pier. Of course, bearing such a burden, it was impossible for him to drag himself up to his former position; he could only cling on to one of the mussel-

encrusted beams, waiting for the boat that the people were now hurriedly pushing off from the shore. And if, while bravely hanging on there, he looked back to see if there was no sign of that other one, then he looked in vain: the corpse of the hapless Anna Chlannach was not found until some two days thereafter.

Meanwhile, this was what was taking place at Lochgarra House. Barbara had come to tell her young mistress, who was lying tired and languid on the sofa, of the arrival of the steamer.

"Go to the window, Barbara," said she, rather faintly, "and—and tell me who are coming ashore. Maybe you can make them out?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, mem," said Barbara, who had been famous for her eyesight, even among the keepers and stalkers, when she was parlour-maid up at Glen Orme.

She went to the window.

"There is Miss Glendinning, mem," said Barbara, in her soft-spoken way; "and glad I am of that: it is not good for Miss Stanley to be so much alone. Yes, and Mr. Ross coming

ashore too—no, he is going back down the gangway—maybe he is going on to Stornoway? —no, no, I think he is only calling something to Coinneach Breac, and the lad Calum—and they are carrying a portmanteau. And there is Anna Chlannach going from the one to the other on the quay—yes, and Mr. Ross now speaking to her — and Miss Glendinning speaking to the Minister. And now Mr. Ross speaking to the Minister—and—and Miss Glendinning watching the steamer—ay, just waiting to see her go aweh. . . . Oh, mem!—oh, mem!—there is something happening on the quay!" exclaimed Barbara, in terrified accents. "The people are running—and I am not seeing Mr. Ross anywhere—and they are shoving out a boat from the shore——"

"What is it!—what is it, Barbara! Tell me!—tell me!"

"Oh, mem, do not be afraid," cried Barbara, even amidst her own wild alarm. "There's a boat going out—oh, yes, they are pulling hard —they will be at the end of the quay in a moment or two—and the people are all looking

over—oh, yes, yes, mem, if anyone is in the water, they have found him—and—and the boat—now the boat has gone by the end of the quay, and I am not seeing it any more—yes, yes, it is there now—and they are coming this way, mem—they will be coming into the slip—oh, yes—I am sure they have got the one that was in the water—and Big Archie in the stern of the boat, mem—and the people now running to meet them at the slip—now it is Big Archie that is lifting the one out of the stern of the boat——" Suddenly Barbara uttered a plaintive cry, "Oh, *Dyeea*, it is the young master himself!"

"What do you say? Mr. Ross? What has happened, Barbara?" She struggled to her feet, pale and shuddering; and Barbara was at her side in an instant. "Quick, Barbara!—come with me!—help me!—I must go down to the slip—your arm, Barbara—help me!—quick quick——"

And so, with trembling limbs and dazed eyes—dazed by the fear of some dread unknown thing—she managed to cross the hall and get

down the steps and across the road. It was but a short distance to the slip. The little crowd made way on her approach: and there, lying extended on the stone, she beheld the senseless body of her lover, while the big fisherman, kneeling, was making such examination as was possible. Big Archie rose at once.

"Oh, he will be ahl right directly, mem—I'm sure of it!—he has been struck on the back of the head—mebbe by the keel of the steamer——"

She paid no heed to him—no, nor to any who were standing there. She threw herself on her knees beside the prostrate figure; with her warm hands she pushed back the coal-black tangled hair; she bent down close to him; she spoke to him, almost in a whisper—but with a passionate tenderness that might have thrilled the dead.

"Donald!—speak to me!—tell me I have not killed you!—I sent you away—yes—but my heart has cried for you to come back—speak to me!—speak to me!—Donald!—do you not hear me?—Donald——"

Was it the touch of her warm, trembling fingers about his face, or was it the low-breathing, piteous cry of her voice that seemed to stir his pulses and call him slowly back to life? The eyelids opened wearily—to find this wonderful vision hanging over him, and they seemed to rest there and understand.

"*Mo-lua!*" * he murmured.

She did not know the meaning of the phrase; but the look in his eyes was enough. She held his hand as they carried him up to the house.

* * * * *

It was on a clear and white-shining morning in the following spring that Donald Ross and his newly-wedded bride were walking arm-in-arm through the budding larch-woods, the sun warm on the green bracken, on the golden furze, and on the grey rocks. She was angry with him; though the anger did not show much in her dimpled and fresh-tinted cheeks, nor yet in her eyes, where the love-light lay only half-concealed by the modest lashes.

* *Mo-luaidh*—My dearest one, or my most-prized one.

"It is a pestilent language!" she was saying, with frowning brows. "I do believe the heavens and the earth shall pass away before I become thoroughly acquainted with that awful grammar; and unless, as Barbara says, I 'have the Gaelic,' how am I ever to get into proper relationship with the people about here?—yes, and how am I to be sure that you are not stealing away their hearts from me? Oh, it is a very pretty trick, the stealing away of hearts—you are rather clever at it," said she, with downcast and smiling eyes.

"*Mo-ghaol*," said he (and there were some Gaelic phrases, at least, of which she had by this time got to know the meaning well enough), "I thought you were going to let me be your interpreter."

"Why do you not begin, then? Where are the verses that Mrs. Armour sent?" she said. "You promised you would write out a translation for me."

"And so I have," he answered her—yet with some apparent unwillingness. "I have written out a translation, in a kind of a way, because

you insisted on it. But it is a shame. For the Gaelic is a most expressive language; and all the subtlety and grace of the original escape when you come down to a literal rendering in English. Besides, what skill have I in such things? If you like, I will send it to the editor of the *Celtic Magazine*, and ask him to get it properly translated—he has printed some of Mrs. Armour's pieces before now—in Gaelic, of course——"

"I want your version—none other," she said, imperatively.

"Very well, very well; I will read it to you," said he, taking a sheet of paper from his pocket. "Here is a seat for you."

It was a rock mostly covered by soft green moss; and when she had seated herself, he threw himself down on the bracken by her side, leaning his head against her knee. And this is what the old dame out there in Canada had sent them as her humble wedding-gift—perhaps, as to the form of it, with some recollection of the song of the Princess Deirdri influencing her unequal lines:—

I am far from the land of my fathers.
I sit and mourn because of the great distance.
My old age brings me no comfort,
Since I am far from my own land.

My eyes strain across the wide ocean.
I see the lofty hills, and the peaks, and the glens;
I see the corries where the wide-antlered deer wander.
Joyful to me was my youth there.

I see the woods, deep-sheltered;
I see the rivers flowing by the rocks;
I see the sandy bays, and the headlands;
I see the sun [setting] behind Eilean Heimra.

Ru-Minard, O Ru-Minard!—
The promontory facing the great waves:
Often as a girl have I sate and watched the ships,
Singing to myself on Ru-Minard.

Loch-Heimra, O Loch-Heimra!—
Pleasant its shores, with the many birches;
Sweet were the youthful moments I spent watching
For one that I used to meet by Loch-Heimra.

Lochgarra, O Lochgarra!—
The fair town—the Town of the Big House——

"I wonder if the Americans know the meaning of Baltimore?" he said; and then he went on again—

Dear to me were my friends, happy the hours
We spent together at Lochgarra.

But to-day there is no more of mourning;
To-day my old age is comforted;
To-day I lift up my voice, I send a message,
Across the sea to the dear one of my heart.

Well I remember him, the young boy fearless;
Fearless on the land, fearless on the sea;
Clinging to the crags seeking the ravens' nests.
Proud was I of Young Donald——

"There are some more verses about me," he again interpolated. "I will skip them."

"You shall not," she said. "Not a single word."

"Oh, how can I read all this about myself!" he protested.

"Well, then, give me the paper," said she, and she leant over and took it from him. Nor did she return it. She read right on to the end—though not aloud—

My eyes have beheld him come to man's estate.
Proudly I name him: Donald, son of John, son of Roderick.
Of the ancient Clan Anrias, high he holds his head.
Joyful were my eyes when I beheld him.

Swift and alert, firm-sinewed as a man.
Laughing and light-hearted: dangerous to his foe.
Strong as an eagle to choose his mate,
Strong likewise to defend her.

Bold-eyed and resolute; confident at the helm;
Long-enduring; scornful of danger.
Small his possessions, but rich-chambered his mind:
Wealth has he other than Eilean Heimra.

I see the people as they go along the road:
Their regard is turned upon Young Donald;
There is deep love in their bosom for him;
They wish him many days and prosperity.

I see her whom he has chosen:
The lady of the Big House near to the trees:
The fair mistress, the beautiful one,
The generous daughter of the Saxon.

Mild of speech, smiling pleasantly:
My heart was warm towards her;
Much did I hear of the kindness
Of the generous, open-handed maiden.

Tall of stature, graceful in step as a young fawn;
Glad was I when I gazed on her;
I regarded her many beauties, and I said—
Well has young Donald chosen his mate.

Now I hear the sound of rejoicings;
I hear the festivities wide-echoing;
Across the ocean I hear the shouts of the wedding:
Hail to the young chief of Clan Anrias!

The wine-cup is lifted by many hands;
The bride and bridegroom are smiling among their friends;
To-night the bonfires will blaze on the hills;
I hear the loud sound of the pipes.

No gifts have I for the home-coming;
No amulet of secret virtue;
But the voice of the woman-bard is welcome to her chief:*
Young Donald will not despise what I send.

Salutations and blessings I send:
Happy may his days be with his love:
Long years, many friends, a warm heart!—
These are the things I wish for him.

For her also the same:
For her, the chosen one, the fair-haired one, the beautiful Saxon;
Many years, and love through all of them,
For the bride of Young Donald of Heimra!

She carefully folded the paper and put it in her pocket.

"This is to be mine," she said. "For if Young Donald despises that message from across the sea, Young Donald's wife does not."

* *Banabhard.*

THE END.

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